

COMIC
BOOKS

COMICS FEATURE

BEWARE!

**THE
PUNISHER**
IS BACK!

NUMBER 57
JULY 1987
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IS HE HERO OR VILLAIN?

GALACTUS

—MIKE BENTON'S LATEST TIPS—

PROFITS FROM COMICS

SPIDER-MAN MOVIE SCRIPTER CHATS WITH
SUPERMAN'S FAMILY

—ROY THOMAS GOLDEN AGE MEMORIES OF—
THE HUMAN TORCH

—CHANGING OF THE GUARD—
SILVER AGE ENDINGS





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COMICS FEATURE

NUMBER 57

JULY 1987

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FEATURES

THE PUNISHER—

You better watch out, you better be good. The Punisher will wipe you out if you aren't! Hot on the heels of the smash boxoffice success of *Death Wish*, Marvel Comics created their own vigilante hero in the pages of *Savage Tales* (the first incarnation that is), a black and white magazine aimed at a mature adult audience. Then over the years, he leaped into color comics, went briefly insane and finally emerged as the hero of a very popular miniseries. Now he is back in his book, one planned to, hopefully, run forever. At the helm are Mike Baron and Al Milgrom, just the pair to pull off a realistic, hard-bitten adventure series with lots of action but little standard superheroes. James Van Hise talked to everyone to bring you the full story as only **COMICS FEATURE** could tell it.

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VILLAINS?— GALACTUS

Is Galactus a hero or villain? James Van Hise recalls the entire history of the character to answer the question. You'll be surprised at what he discovers along the way.

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COVER BY VINCE ARGONDEZZI FEATURING HIS VIEW OF THE PUNISHER, COPYRIGHT 1987 MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP. VINCE IS THE TALENTED ARTIST ON INFINITY, INC., WRITTEN BY ROY THOMAS, ANOTHER COMICS FEATURE CONTRIBUTOR.

COLUMNS

INDEPENDENT LINE—

What do Concrete, Trekker and Boris the Bear have in common? They're all published by Dark Horse, the single best independent comic book publisher! Plus the hottest news and the latest listings.

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FUN&PROFIT—

Mike Benton calls the 1970s the Forgotten Decade but claims that there were a lot of books worth remembering! And he tells you just which ones will be future moneymakers.

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SILVER AGE—

After the debacle of the censorship crusade of the Fifties, comics went into a nosedive and no new writers or artists entered the field. By the end of the Sixties the old writers were retiring. What do you do when you suddenly need lots of new talent? Gerard Jones reveals the whole story behind the stories.

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COMICS ON FILM—

Writing the Spider-Man movie is just enough experience to get to be a **COMICS FEATURE** guest columnist. Of course, when Ted Newsom pulled off an interview with virtually the whole cast of the old *Superman* tv show, that clinched it!

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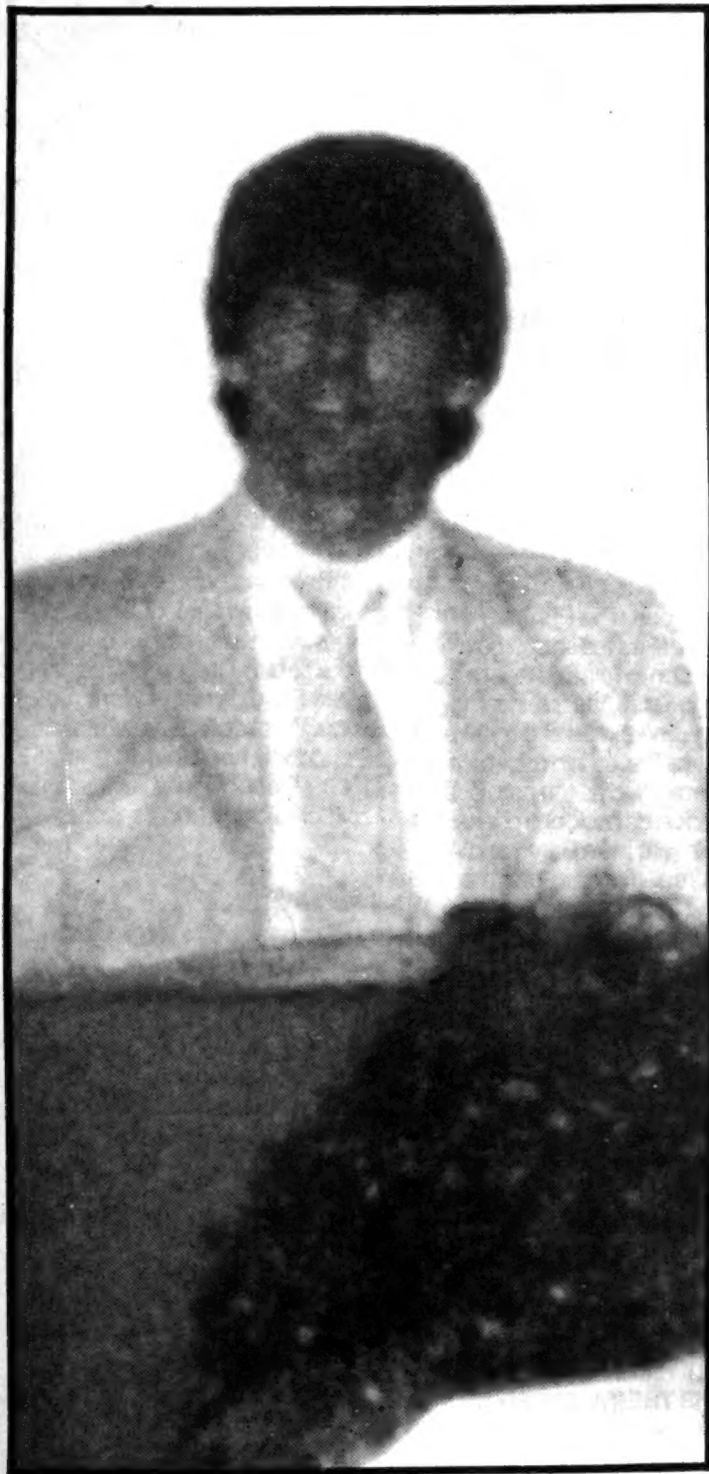
GOLDEN AGE—

Roy Thomas may have written the adventures of the Invaders in the '70s which included Marvel's original flaming hero, but here he goes back to the '40s to recount how it all began.

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FEATURE NEWS

SHOOTER OUT, DEFALCO IN AS MARVEL HEAD HONCHO



Jim Shooter, editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics for more than the past decade is no longer with the company. Rumors float about as to the exact reason for the separation, and even the very nature of the separation as well as to Shooter's future plans.

The new editor-in-chief is Tom DeFalco, formerly executive editor under Shooter. DeFalco first became an editor while at Archie Comics and then moved over to Marvel Comics a number of years ago. Since that time he has not only edited and written books for the company but was the key individual responsible for the launching of the entire Star Comics line.

While the company is in good hands with DeFalco, it is certainly a loss to the House of Ideas and to creative professionals in the industry to lose Shooter at the helm of the largest publisher of comic books in America. Shooter fought very hard for the rights of freelancers, attempting and succeeding in gaining them many new benefits and protections as well as residual rights in their work for the company. Although he received something of a black eye as the public spokesman for Marvel in its dispute with Jack Kirby, it is known that behind-the-scenes he exerted considerable pressure to attempt to secure the return of Kirby's artwork to the creator. One of the least recognized but most important contributions that Shooter had made to the company was the ending of the constant "Deadline Doom."

Retailers within the direct, specialty comic book, market purchase all product on a final sale basis. Prior to Shooter's assuming the mantle a the helm of the company, Marvel was notorious for inserting reprints instead of the regularly scheduled and announced issue. This meant that the retailer, who purchased his books based on the announced contents, then received a reprint instead, was unable to return it for credit, and found himself with unsalable product. Shooter ended that for all time and created an inventory system that is used to this day. Missed deadlines do not take place as frequently and when they do, another new issue, albeit not the scheduled one, is inserted in its place. Serious collectors who were forced to purchase the reprint fill-ins to maintain their collection were also very pleased by this change.

COMICS FEATURE will run interviews with both DeFalco and Shooter in the near future, after plans become more firm for both gentlemen and the rumor mill begins to slow its grinding.



DC TO LAUNCH MORE THAN 30 NEW TITLES IN 1987

At DC Comics' annual meeting with the company's direct market distributors, Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano presented the editorial line-up for the remainder of 1987.

"1986 was a big year for comics in general — and DC Comics in particular," noted Giordano. "Certainly, we all saw the impact of **Dark Knight**, **Man of Steel**, and **Watchmen**.. I predict that 1987 will be our best publishing year yet. We've got a great editorial staff in place — the best in the business — and well, the line-up speaks for itself."

The year began with the debut of a completely new format for comic books: offset printing on Mando paper, inexpensively priced. The Spectre revitalization appeared in this new format. Other new titles begun in the early months of the year include the **Shazam** miniseries, an all new **Justice League** (which is about to undergo an-

other revision and a name change to **Justice League International**), **Suicide Squad**, **Flash**, **Dr. Fate**, **Centurions**, **Shadow**, **Young All-Stars**, and **Who's Who Update '87**.

"And that's only the beginning," explains Giordano. Highlights from among DC Comics' upcoming new series for 1987 yet to be released include:

Millennium is a weekly eight-issue limited crossover series that spans the DC Comics Universe with a tale of Earth under siege. It will include tie-ins with titles across the DC Comics line, ranging from **Firestorm** and **Justice League** to **Green Lantern Corps** and **Action Comics**. The series is written by Steve Englehart and illustrated by Joe Staton and Ian Gibson.

Blackhawk, Howard Chaykin's three-issue miniseries provides his unique perspective on Blackhawk, with new elements and adventures.



THE SHADOW

Green Arrow: The Longbow Hunters is a three-issue series written and illustrated by Mike Grell and colored by science fiction illustrator Julia Lacquement. This series takes a whole new look at DC Comics' long-time heroic archer as he reassesses his life and takes it in a new direction.

Doc Savage, like **The Shadow**, will bring a pulp hero back to life. Doc and his men have a traitor in their midst — and it may spell doom for the team and Doc's children. The art on this one is by the brothers Kubert, Andy and Adam, the sons of the great Joe Kubert. Writing is by Denny O'Neil who should have a good handle on pulp action although we can only hope that DC does not work the travesty on this classic hero that they did on **The Shadow**.

Outcasts, a 12-issue maxi-series written by British talents John Wagner and Alan Grant and illustrated by Cam Kennedy with Steve Montano, looks at an oppressive society in the not-so-distant future, a society that hunts down anyone and everyone who is just a little bit different. The "outcasts" are the only hope for society...but their chance is very small.

Peacemaker is a four-issue miniseries written by Paul Kupperberg and illustrated by Tod Smith and Jack Torrance. The Charlton Comics hero returns to his own book, although how they will portray him considering the changes they have wrought in this character, remains to be seen. The hero/diplomat from the Charlton stable has literally been driven insane in stories published by



JUSTICE LEAGUE

DC. **Silverblade**, a 12-issue maxiseries written by Cary Bates and illustrated by Gene Colan and Steve Mitchell depicts the fate of Jonathan Lord, an aging film star who suddenly inherits the power to become any character he has played on the screen.

Sonic Disruptors is a 12-issue maxiseries written by Mike Baron and illustrated by Barry Crain and Jon Nyberg. This series looks at a world much like our own. The series focuses heavily on rock 'n' roll music.

DC Comics also continues its commitment to the graphic novel format with three joint publishing ventures with Warner Books. These books will be published first in a DC Comics trade paperback edition, available only in comic book specialty shops. One month later Warner Books will publish a trade paperback edition with a different cover that will be available in bookstores in the U.S. and Canada. The titles scheduled for release in this manner are **Swamp Thing**, reprinting issues #21 through #27, **Watchmen**, reprinting the entire series, issues #1 through #12, and **Ronin**, also reprinting the entire series, issues #1 through #6. In addition, DC Comics will publish **Batman: Son of the Demon**, written by Mike W. Barr and illustrated by Jerry Bingham. This first DC Comics character graphic novel will be released first in a DC Comics hardcover edition and three months later in a DC Comics trade paperback edition.

Among other projects on tap for DC Comics in 1987 are numerous new ongoing series, including: **Doom Patrol**, written by Paul Kupperberg and illustrated by Steve

Lightle and Gary Martin. **Green Arrow**, written by Mike Grell and pencilled by Ed Hannigan, **Hellraisers**, a **Swamp Thing** spin-off, written by Jamie Delano and illustrated by John Ridgway, **Wanderers**, written by Doug Moench and illustrated by Steve Dillon, and based on characters created in the late Sixties by former Marvel Comics editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, and. **Wasteland**, an anthology title written and illustrated by a regular creative team on something of a revolving basis.

There are also many four-issue mini-series scheduled for DC Comics release in 1987, including:

Amethyst, written by Keith Giffen and Mindy Newell with illustrations by Esteban Maroto, .

Cinder and Ashe, written by Gerry and illustrated by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez,.

Forever People, written by J. M. DeMatteis and illustrated by Paris Cullins,.

Phantom Stranger, written by Paul Kupperberg and illustrated by Mike Mignola,.

Underworld, written by Robert Loren Fleming and illustrated by Ernie Colon,.

Wild Dog, written by Max Allan Collins and illustrated by Terry Beatty and Dick Giordano and

World of Krypton, written by John Byrne and illustrated by Mike Mignola and Rick Bryant.

Three other Superman related specials are also planned to tie-in with his anniversary celebration, including one devoted to Smallville, where he spent his boyhood, and one devoted to Metropolis. The third will be a collection of past stories, although how they will produce this last without confusing readers impossibly with the differences with their current character remains to be seen. The other special volumes should be quite useful in filling in background on the new Man of Steel since information up to this point has been sparse. .

"I am very proud of the line my editors have put together for 1987," Giordano concluded. "We have the best talents available putting together a great list of titles. I look forward to a very successful year."

It is indeed a far more ambitious plan than any undertaken by any comic book publisher in years. It will be interesting to see whether the company can really produce all that it promises, but even if only most of these titles actually appear this year, it will still be a good year for DC indeed.



In the May 22, 1987 **Comics Buyers Guide**, Marvel editor Howard Mackie reported that "We're doing big things with **Star Brand** in particular and the New Universe line in general."

Mackie, the editor of four New Universe titles, **D.P. 7**, **Justice**, **Psi Force** and **The Star Brand** (the four other New Universe titles have been cancelled, including **Kickers, Inc.**, **Merc**, **Night Mask** and **Splitfire**), announced that "many big events will take place, and we'll see long-lasting effects of those events throughout the four New Universe titles."

Some of the characters will make themselves known to the public, while virtually all of them will appear in each other's books in a series of planned crossovers and the heroes are scheduled to work together at various times. Mackie did say that the events in the stories would continue to take place in "real time" and that all of the initial premises of the New Universe would be continued.

It is interesting to note that the books which remain are those which feature almost straight-forward superheroes such as **Star Brand** and **Justice** or those which follow closely in the tracks of the popular **X-Men**, presenting a group of superpowered outcasts, such as **Psi Force** and the **D.P. 7**. The cancelled titles, especially **Merc** and **Kickers, Inc.** ranged much farther afield. These books exhibited some of the ideas that Jim Shooter has been trying to project into comics for some years, including in such books as **Team America** and **US1**. Unfortunately this injection of realism into the comic books does not seem to find a ready market.

The creative teams for the remaining New Universe books are as follows:

D.P. 7—Mark Gruenwald, Paul Ryan and Al Williamson,

Justice—Peter David and a yet-unassigned art team,

Psi Force—Fabian Nicieza and a yet-unassigned art team, and

The Star Brand—renamed from **Star Brand**—breakdowns and script by John Byrne with finishes by Tom Palmer.

DC

7/14/87 SHIPPING GROUP

AMETHYST #1—

(of 4) (Giffen&Newell/Maroto) Amethyst vs. Mordur.

Direct sales only.

FIRESTORM #65—

(Ostrander/Andru) A brand new Firestorm.

FLASH #6—

(Baron/Guice/Mahlstedt)

OUTCASTS #2—

(of 12) (Wagner&Grant/Kennedy/Montano) Direct sales only.

THE OUTSIDERS #25—

(Barr/Aparo/Smith) Direct sales only

TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #83—

(Wolfman/Barretto/Tanghal) Reprints NTT #23.

VIGILANTE #47—

(Kupperberg/Smith/Burchett) Direct sales only

WHO'S WHO UPDATE '87 #4—

(of 5)

WILD DOG #3—

(Collins/Beatty/Giordano)

WONDER WOMAN #10—

(Perez&Wein/Perez/Patterson) Part 1 of 4-parts
Challenge of the Gods.

7/21/87 SHIPPING GROUP

BATMAN #413—

(Collins/Cockrum/DeCarlo) The Joker.

BLUE BEETLE #18—

(Wein/Cullins) Return of the original Blue Beetle.

JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL #7—

(Giffen&DeMatteis/Maguire/Gordon)

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #40—

(Levitz/LaRocque/DeCarlo) Direct sales only

SECRET ORIGINS #20—

Randall&Thomas/Leonardi&Clark—Dr. Mid-Nite.

Plus the completely revised history of Batgirl.

SILVERBLADE #3—

(of 12) (Bates/Colan/Mitchell) Direct sales only

STAR TREK #44—

(Carlin/Sutton/Villagran) Part 2 of a 3-part story.

SUPERMAN #11—

(Byrne/Kesel) Mr. Mxyzptlk.

TEEN TITANS ANNUAL #3—

(Wolfman/Collins/Tanghal) Direct sales only

YOUNG ALL-STARS #6—

(Thomas&Thomas/Murray/Jones) Battle to finish
with Axis America. Direct sales only

7/28/87 SHIPPING GROUP

ADV. OF SUPERMAN #434—

(Wolfman/Ordway/Beatty)

BOOSTER GOLD #22—

(Jurgens and ?)

THE DOOM PATROL #2—

(Kupperberg/Lightle/Martin)

GREEN LANTERN CORPS #218—

(Englehart/Staton/Farmer) Three new members and
the return of Sinestro.

INFINITY, INC. #44—

(Thomas&Thomas/Argondezzi/DeZuniga) Northwind
vs. Silver Scarab, plus Infinity vs The Eye of Ra. Di-
rect sales only

THE NEW TEEN TITANS #37—

(Wolfman/Barretto/Tanghal) Direct sales only

PHANTOM STRANGER #2—

(of 4) (Kupperberg/Mignola/Russell)

THE SHADOW #4—

(of 6) (Helfer/Sienkiewicz) Direct sales only

SLASH MARAUD #1—

(Moench/Gulacy) Direct sales only

SWAMP THING #66—

(Veitch/Alcala) Return of Floronic Man and Con-
stantine. Direct sales only

WARLORD #123—

(Fleisher/Duursema/Mandrake)

8/4/87 SHIPPING GROUP

ACTION COMICS #594—

(Byrne/Giordano) Guest starring Booster Gold.

CAPTAIN ATOM #9—

(Bates/Broderick/Smith)

DETECTIVE COMICS #580—

(Barr and ?) Two Two-Faces.

DOC SAVAGE #1—

(of 4) (O'Neil/Adam Kubert/Andy Kubert) A mole
in Doc's ranks. Direct sales only

HAWKMAN #16—

(Mishkin/Howell/Garzon) Hawkman berserk.

QUESTION #10—

(O'Neil/Cowan/Magyar) Direct sales only

SPECTRE #8—

(Moench/Kennedy/Mignola) Part 2 of 2, showdown
in limbo with Wotan; with life of Zatanna as prize.
Direct sales only

SUICIDE SQUAD #7—

(Ostrander/McDonnell/Lewis) Conclusion of Rus-
sian mission.

SWAMP THING TRADE PB—

(Moore'Bissette/Totleben) Reprints issues #21-#27.

TALES OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #353—

(Levitz/LaRocque/DeCarlo) Reprints #28.

Independent Line

BLACKTHORNE BRINGS THE TRANSFORMERS TO 3-D, SHIFTS COMPANY EMPHASIS TO COLOR COMICS

In association with Hasbro, Inc., The Transformers are coming to comics in a completely new, eight-issue 3-D series from Blackthorne Publishing, Inc. These successful toys have been on the Top 10 Seller List for over two years and, with the accomplishment of *The Transformers* movie and syndicated TV series, their visibility and popularity is estimated to increase in 1987 according to Blackthorne Publisher Steve Schanes.

Blackthorne Publisher Schanes says, "publishing Transformers in 3-D is a terrific coup for us. The title already has a large and enthusiastic following, which we hope to capture."

The Transformers is a 32-page, 3-D bi-monthly comic with full color, laser-scanned covers. One pair of 3-D glasses will be included with each comic. The Transformers will retail for \$2.50 at bookstores and toystores throughout the US and Canada. Release is scheduled for June 1987.

In other news, Blackthorne announced the cancellation of several of its black and white titles. Publisher Steve Schanes states, "market conditions have dictated that we direct our resources toward developing our line of color comics. We believe this emphasis will help us continue to grow at the rapid pace we have enjoyed."

Blackthorne's line of color comics, which features Bruce Jones, Steve Perry, Del Barras, Frank Cirroco, Mike Kaluta, Joe Kubert, Jim Starlin, Neal Adams and Frank Frazetta, will debut with two titles in June.

The black and white titles due to be discontinued are as follows (issue numbers denote the last issue scheduled to be published): Duckbots #2, Midnight #3, Atomic Man #3, Mr. Cream Puff #1, Figments #2, Freak Out on Infant Earths #2, Jerry Iger's Golden Features #6, Mad Dog Magazine #3, Of Myths & Men #3, Possibleman #2, The Purple Snit #3, Tales of the Jackalope #7, Blackthorne's 3 in 1 #3 and Jax #3.

Quality Comics

INCREDIBLE ORIGIN ISSUE

SPECIAL
NO. 1
Summer, 1987
\$1.75 U.S.
\$2.30 Can.

POPEYE

BORNED TO THE SEA!



POPEYE IS BACK!

This time we're just going to drop that teaser on you since we're out of space, but the next Independent Line will feature a complete rundown of the return of the cartoon heroes of the '60s to comic book form including a brief survey of Gumby, Astro Boy, Jonny Quest, Bullwinckle...



**DARK
HORSE
COMICS**

A DARK HORSE

I just can't resist the pun. This is a serious piece aimed at convincing you to take a look at a little appreciated comic book publisher, a small one that arose in the Northwest wilds of Portland, Oregon. Not exactly the kind of place you would think to look for a comic book company. And who had ever heard of Mike Richardson, the publisher, or even Randy Stradley, the editor? Yet those little-heralded individuals are turning out some of the best graphic entertainment in the business. And I am terribly afraid that you are going to miss it. They don't advertise a lot, and as publishers of black and white comic books they risk getting lost in the avalanche/glut/bust-in-the-market—you take your pick. The name of the company, and that's where the joke comes in, is Dark Horse.

Well some times dark horses do win and if there is any justice at all in this world, these guys will stick around to produce many, many more excellent comic books. Their current lineup consists of **Dark Horse Presents**, an anthology showcase title as the name would indicate, **Concrete**, one of the best and oddest comic books to come along in quite some time, **Boris the Bear**, one of the very few funny animal satire vehicles that works—and perhaps their best known book—and



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1.50
2.30



Trekker, the story of one of the most captivating bounty hunters in the comic book world. **Concrete** and **Trekker** both began their careers in the pages of **Dark Horse Presents** as did one of their newest series, **Wacky Squirrel's Summer Fun Special**. I haven't seen that one yet and so cannot comment on it. Nor can I say much about another of their new books, **Godzilla**, except that since it is scheduled to be produced by Steve Bisette, Tony Salmons and Randy Stradley, I will certainly read it as soon as it is available. Yet other new titles of theirs are some things entitled **The Book of the Night** which reprints material from the pages of **Epic Magazine** and **Basil Wolverton's Planet of Terror**. There are plenty of companies producing reprints galore and this talented group would be better off concentrating on new material. But I suppose there's quite a bit of cash involved in reprints when compared with the work required. Well, if they help them keep their other books going, then they're worthy projects.

Dark Horse Presents, while a showcase book, does seem to primarily concentrate on science fiction. Previous issues have carried Ron Randall's **Trekker**, John Workman's **Roma**, Paul Chadwick's **Concrete**, James Dean Smith's **Pookey**, Smith and Stradley's **Boris** and a



few other choice pieces.

Trekker may be one of the few places that you can find both Randall's writing and art. He does a fair job of taking hard bitten characters, here a female bounty hunter and her police officer uncle, and setting them in a future milieu ala *Bladerunner* (and numerous science fiction tales that preceded that, actually). He pulls it off pretty well but you do almost expect to hear the narrator or one of the characters echo that old line about walking the mean streets....The artwork somehow keeps reminding me of Carmine Infantino although it is not the kind of strip Carmine did and it certainly has a grittier feel. It does seem a little smooth for the story that is being told though. This is one of the strips that graduated into its own book.

Mindwalk isn't one that really appealed to me very much although it has all the trappings of what makes a comic book popular.

Roma is interesting but not enough of the tale has been told yet to judge how well it will really work. So far it has really been more of a teaser about 'the alien on Earth that thinks she's only human until confronted with the facts (?) of the matter'. Workman's art here is very much akin to a latter-day Toth, right down to forcing the reader to turn the damn pages sideways. Workman does seem to have a good handle on utilizing white space and black areas, but he's still not as good as Toth yet. But then again, who is?

Other than Boris the Bear, who had his own book from the beginning and who helped launch the line when there was a bit of a mini-boom among big buck collectors for his early issues, Concrete has really been the star of the show. I hesitate to even try to describe the unique protagonist that Chadwick has created here other than simply to tell you that while he's not the least bit human looking, he is one of the most human and humane characters in comic books. If he really existed, you would want to get to know him. Since he doesn't, you will want to read about him.

With several of the better strips spinning off into their own titles, Trekker, Concrete and that wascally Wacky Squirrel, and the new Godzilla series, there are some really good books coming out from Dark Horse. And I'm even going to be kind enough to tell you where to write for them—do remember to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your inquiry letter though, won't you—Dark Horse Comics Publishing Co., 3376 N. E. Sandy Blvd., Portland, OR 97232-1927. And do tell them that Happy Hal sent ya...

COLOR COMICS

GROO #33
VIDEO JACK #1
MOEBIUS GRAPHIC NOVEL #2
ELFQUEST #28
ASSASSIN #1
FANTASY FEATURES #1
SOLDIERS OF FREEDOM #1
DRAGONRING #8
ELFLORD #10
BOZO 3-D #1
CROW OF THE BEARCLAN #6
FLINTSTONES IN 3-D #2
GUMBY IN 3-D #4
HAMSTER VICE #10
JACK HUNTER #2
LOCKE #1
OMNI MEN #1
OUTPOSTS #2
BORIS COLOR CLASSICS #1
THE MARK #1
AIRBOY #25
THE LIBERTY PROJECT #2
SCOUT #21
TALES OF TERROR #13
HOTSPUR #2
LOST PLANET #2
REAL WAR STORIES
AIRBOY #26
HAND OF FATE #1
MR. MONSTER'S SPECIAL #8
PROWLER #1
VALKYRIE #3
ESPERS #7
DETECTIVES INC. #2
AXA #2
SISTERHOOD OF STEEL GRAPHIC NOVEL #12
GONAD THE BARBARIAN #1
PELLESTAR #1
PIRATE CORPS #1
FUTURIANS GRAPHIC NOVEL #2
FRAZETTA'S UNTAMED LOVE #1
ROG-2000 #2
BADGER #29
EVANGELINE #4
NEXUS #38
DREADSTAR #33
GRIMJACK #40
PSYCHOBlast #1
AMERICAN FLAGG! #46
DYNAMO JOE #13
THE CHRONICLES OF CO-RUM #6
HAWKMOON #2
SABLE #53

VIKING HEROES #3
CAPT. THUNDER&BLUE BOLT #2
CHAMPIONS #2
ETERNITY SMITH #2
ARCANE SUMMER SPECIAL
BATTLETECH #2
GODS FOR HIRE #7
HOT SHOTS #4
GODS FOR HIRE #7
STINGER #1
WHAM! #1
THE SOLUTION #1
SCION #1
STELLAR CROSS #1
DAI KAMIKAZE #3
ASTRO BOY #1
RALPH SNART #10
RUST #2
SPEED RACER #2
SYPHONS #7
JUDGE DREDD #8
ROGUE TROOPER #8
SAM SLADE #8
SLAINE #1
SPELLBINDERS #6
STRONTIUM DOG #1
2000 AAD PRESENTS #14
CHEECH WIZARD #4
MS TREE 3-D CLASSIC CRIME #1
3-D ZONE #6
COSMONEERS #1
HELL HOUNDS #1
LANCE #1
MYSTIC ISLE #2
ASSASINS, INC. #1
GLOBAL FORCE #1
MUTANTS&MISFITS #1
ATHE PRIVATEERS #2
PROJECT: HERO #2
MISTER X #12

BLACK AND WHITE COMICS

THE GOOD ONES.

WORTH SEEKING OUT:

AMERICAN SPLENDOR #12
DICK TRACY MONTHLY #15
DICK TRACY UNTOLD STORIES #1
GODZILLA #1
TREKKER #2
WOLVERTON'S PLANET OF TERROR #1
CONCRETE #3
DARK HORSE PRESENTS #9
JOURNEY: WARDRUMS #3
LONE WOLF AND CUB #3
SPIRIT #33
MS. TREE #41

THE REST OF THE CROP:

PUMA BLUES #9
ELF WARRIOR #3
BLOOD OF DRACULA #2
ELFQUEST #2
FANTASCI #8
THUNDERBUNNY #12
DEADWORLD #4
NIGHTSTREETS #5
THE REALM #9
STORMBRINGER #2
CROW OF THE BEAR CLAN #5
LABOR FORCE #8
LAFFIN' GAS #11
BOOK OF THE NIGHT #1
BORIS THE BEAR #12
WACKY SQUIRREL'S FUN #1
BLADE OF SHURIKEN #3
CARNAGE #2
G.I. MUTANTS #2
GORE SHRIEK #2
BUMBLE-PUPPY #2
CRITTERS #18
NEAT STUFF #8
PARTICLE DREAMS #6
SINNER BOOK #2
USAGI YOJIMBO #3
EQUINE #4
MORPHS #2
JOHNNY GAMBIT #4
SHADOW BLADE #4
OMAHA #7
EDDY CURRENT #1
MAN-FROG #1
SPLAT! #3
BADE BIKER #5
GIZMO #7
TALES OF TURTLES #2
TURTLE SOUP #1
ULTRA KLUTZ #13
AMUSING STORIES #3
FLAMING CARROT #17
FRENCH ICE #5
FRIENDS #2
KAFKA #4
MECHTHINGS #1
'ROSCOE THE DAWG #1
EAGLE #7
THE MIGHTY MITES #2
NINJA FUNNIES #6
AREA 88 #4
CALIFORNIA GIRLS #2
CROSSFIRE #23
KAMUI #4
MAI #4
ZOT! #14

As you can no doubt tell, we have trimmed lots of the listings of black and whites out. With this market in an much

flux as it is, it simply makes no sense and does a disservice to the reader to list loads of books that will probably never happen, sending you looking for non-existent titles and publishers. It is now more important than ever for every publisher to send us their titles so that we can be sure what can be listed safely, prove you exist, send us a package.

Special note: COMICS FEATURES INDEPENDENT LINE, our semi-regular publication devoted to independent comic books, will now be distributed on the newsstands, in fact almost everywhere that you find COMICS FEATURE, in the hopes of providing valuable information in the form of articles, hero histories, interviews and reviews to readers who would otherwise not be exposed to all of these fabulous, but little-circulated books. Addresses of all publishers covered will be included. So if you're a publisher, and would like to be considered for inclusion, send us a letter and put us on your list for copies each issue. Otherwise you may not come to our attention and we will not be able to provide you with proper coverage.

Once again I have selected a small list of books that are worth your seeking out and reading. If you do try a new book because of this suggestion, please do contact me and let me know what you think!

SPECIAL NOTICE: Since so many of the publishers of small black and whites have shifted over to doing small color comics now, we will begin to apply the same rules to independent color comics next issue that we now apply to black and whites. Otherwise this listing will become unreliable and we do not want to mislead readers. Our first obligation is to our readers not to the comic book publishers.

MARVEL.

7/7/87 SHIPPING GROUP

DAREDEVIL #248—

(Nocenti/Leonardi)

NEW MUTANTS #57—

(L. Simonson/Blevins/Austin) Background of Bird-brain

PSI FORCE #13—

(Nicieza/Hall/Williamson)

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #32—

(4 of 6) (DeMatteis/Zeck/McLeod)

WEST COAST AVENGERS #26—

(Englehart/Milgrom/Machlin) Wonder Man vs. The Abomination.

STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI #12—

(Gillis/Anderson/Williams) Direct sales only

CONAN THE KING #43—

(Kraar/Docherty/Bator)

MERC ANNUAL #1—

(Murray/Waller/) Death of Mark Hazzard.

X-MEN ANNUAL #11—

(Claremont/Davis/Neary) Starring Capt. Britain, Maggan and the Horde. Focus is on Wolverine.

ROBOCOP #1—

(?) One shot adaptation

7/14/87 SHIPPING GROUP

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #294—

(5 of 6) (DeMatteis/Zeck/McLeod) Last stand of Kraven.

CAPTAIN AMERICA #335—

(Gruenwald/Morgan/DeZuniga)

FALLEN ANGELS #8—

(of 8) (Duffy/Gammill)

STRANGE TALES #8—

Austin/Blevins/Wiacek on Cloak and Dagger

Gillis/Shoemaker/Emberlin on Dr. Strange

ALPHA FLIGHT #52—

(Mantlo/Brigman/Portacio) Guest starring Wolverine. Direct sales only

HEADMASTERS #3—

(of 4) (Budiansky/Springer/Akin & Garvey)

D.P. 7 ANNUAL #1—

(Gruenwald/Weeks/DeZuniga) Introducing Witness

SPIDER-MAN DIGEST #6—

(Lee/Romita/Mooney) Reprints #68-#70

SAVAGE SWORD #141—

(Dixon/Kwapisz/Chan)

G.I. JOE ORDER OF BATTLE PB—

Reprints Order of Battle series

7/21/87 SHIPPING GROUP

MARVEL AGE #56—

Direct sales only

AVENGERS #285—

(Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer) Conclusion Olympian Gods saga.

D.P. 7 #13—

(Gruenwald/Ryan/Williamson)

HULK #337—

(David/McFarlane) Guest starring X-Factor, Doc Samson and SHIELD.

JUSTICE #13—

(Clark&Chichester/Grindberg)

MARVEL TALES #205—

(Claremont/Byrne/Villamonte) Reprints #69

PUNISHER #4—

(Baron/Janson)

SILVER SURFER #5—

(Englehart/Rogers/Rubinstein) Guest starring Mantis.

X-MEN #223—

(Claremont/Gammill/Green) Highlights Freedom Force, continues Reality War

G.I. JOE #65—

(Hama/Wagner/Mushynsky)

MARVEL SAGA #24—

Direct sales only

CONAN #200—

(Owsley/Semeiks/Isherwood) Guest starring Red Sonja, double-sized conclusion to Devourer of Souls story.

MARVEL FANFARE #35—

(Zelenetz/Vess) 2 of 4-parts featuring Warriors Three. Direct sales only

THE BIG CHANCE:

THE THING & HULK GRAPHIC NOVEL—

(Starlin/Wrightson)

7/28/87 SHIPPING GROUP

FANTASTIC FOUR #308—

(Englehart/J. Buscema/Sinnott)

IRON MAN #224—

(Michelinie/Bright/Layton)

THE 'NAM #12—

(Murray/Severin)

PETER PARKER #132—

(6 of 6) (DeMatteis/Zeck/McLeod)

THOR #385—

(DeFalco/Frenz) Guest starring Warriors Three as Asgard is set adrift

X-FACTOR #22—

(L. Simonson/S. Buscema)

CLASSIC X-MEN #15—

(Claremont/Byrne/Austin) Reprint Plus Claremont/Bolton 12-page Starjammers story

POWER PACK #33—

(L. Simonson/Bogdanove/Barta) Guest starring Bobby and Warlock

TRANSFORMERS #34—

(Budiansky/Akin&Garvey)

PETER PARKER ANNUAL #7—

(Owsley/Kupperberg/Fern) Peter and MJ's honeymoon.

FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON

70s Style(?)



Every decade produces its own type of comics and comic collector.

In the 1940s, we had the fabled Golden Age of Comics and the first generation of superheroes. The 1950s saw the birth of EC and the beginnings of an early comic collecting fandom. The 1960s gave us the second generation of superheroes and the Silver Age of Comics. The 1980s has perhaps already seen more comic publishers and exciting new concepts than any of the years before.

But wait you say—what about the 1970s?

Although not as important as the Sixties nor as exciting as the Eighties, comic books from the 1970s hold real promise for the comic book collector and investor.

Right now, back issue comics from the 1970s are in plentiful and cheap supply. Stores and dealers are overstocked on books from 10 to 15 years ago.

"Comics from the last two or three months outsell my back issues from the '70s by ten to one," a retail comic dealer told me.

"Almost once a week, I have collectors who come into the store and dump their collections that they assembled during that time. I have far more comics from the Seventies than collectors who want them."

And that means one thing to you the collector and investor: big bargains and good deals.

Unfortunately, there were a lot of mediocre comics published from 1970 to 1979. Most collectors agree that the 1970s was the most dismal decade in comic history.

It would be a real mistake, however, to ignore the comics that came out during this time. For one thing, many of the characters, artists and hot titles of the Eighties owe a debt to their predecessors of the previous decade.

Such titles of the 1980s as **The Shadow**, **Howard the Duck**, **Swamp Thing**, and others had their first runs in the Seventies.

So hop into the four color time machine—it's back to the past, to the Seventies, and the newsstands of long ago.

DC COMICS: SEVENTIES STYLE

During the 1970s, long-time DC artist Carmine Infantino held the reigns as DC's publisher. Old titles were dropped, and many new titles and experiments were started.

Many of these new DC titles of the 1970s lasted only a few issues. They were not widely collected nor appreciated by collectors. Yet from the vantage point of the present, you can now appreciate these books for what they were.

THE SHADOW—Howard Chaykin has received a lot of attention as the artist of the new limited **Shadow** series done last year. Yet over thirteen years ago in November, 1973, DC published a **Shadow** series that beats the newer version hands down.

This series of the **Shadow** lasted for 12 issues, until

May, 1975. Collectors should look for issues one through four and six, all of which featured fantastic period art by Mike Kaluta. Investors may want to look at number six in particular, since it is "scarcer" than the first two issues, and it also features the best story in the series.

You can get almost all of the Kaluta issues for a dollar or so. They're common to find now, but also uncommonly good to read..

{Editor's Note: While this bit of information is not necessarily aimed at the investor it certainly is at the lover of good storytelling. While the Kaluta issues are indeed good, there was an artist on the series that equalled or perhaps even exceeded him in the ability to evoke the flavor of the period and portray The Shadow in a spirit honest to the pulps. That was Frank Robbins, who had previously crafted the excellent Scortchy Smith newspaper strip, and may be one of the most underestimated talents to ever labor in the comic book field.}

THE SWAMP THING—For many of today's comic readers, the Swamp Thing means Alan Moore and his groundbreaking stories. For long-time collectors, however, the person most intimately associated with old Swampie is Bernie Wrightson.

The original Swamp Thing got his book in October, 1972, after his debut in *House of Secrets* #92. The first ten issues of the original **Swamp Thing** were packed with some of Wrightson's best comic art ever.

Unfortunately, given the abundance of all comics from

the 1970s, these issues are still slightly overpriced. With a little bargaining, however, you can still get the Wrightson issues for half of their retail value. If you just want to sample Wrightson's work, check out the **DC Special Series #2** which reprints the first two issues of the original *Swamp Thing*. It'll cost you fifty cents or a buck.

BATMAN—Every decade, the Dark Detective has his heyday. In the 1970s, Batman hit his peak in a series of stories by Marshall Rogers and Steven Englehart in **Detective Comics #471-478**. Until Frank Miller, many fans have deemed these issues the ultimate definition of the Batman character. The Rogers issues are a little tougher to find than the other **Detectives** from the 1970s, yet you should be able to turn up nice issues for two to three dollars.

And while you're looking at **Detectives** from the '70s, take a close look at the Manhunter backup series in issues 437 through 443 by Walt Simonson. The stories (written by Archie Goodwin) were some of the more adult material being done for DC during that decade.

JACK KIRBY—After almost single-handedly creating the Marvel line of comics in the 1960s, Jack Kirby left Stan Lee and company and moved to DC. While his work for DC during the 1970s suffers by comparison with his monumental output for Marvel, the King did create some of the most innovative new titles and characters of this decade.





Although he worked on a few other projects, Kirby's best work in the Seventies was on the New Gods trilogy in the issues of **New Gods** #s 1 to 12, **Forever People** #s 1 to 11 and **Mr. Miracle** #s 1 to 18.

When these books came out, they were bought in large quantities by dealers and speculators. Thus for a long time, collectors could often find these issues in "quarter boxes" at conventions.

You'll probably have to pay more than two-bits for Kirby's DC books now, but try a few.

OTHER DC TITLES—There were many other gems from DC Comics in the 1970s. Since these are still easily available and inexpensive, collectors may wish to check out such titles as the old Teen Titans (particularly the later issues by Nick Cardy), Rima (by Nestor Redondo) and various issues of the Justice League of America, such as #s 100 to 114, and issues 139 to 150.

Look especially for titles and comics from DC from the 1970s that featured work by Kaluta, Wrightson, Rogers and Chaykin. For example, *Sword of Sorcery* was a five issue title that featured great art by Chaykin, Walt Simonson and Jim Starlin. Other titles to scout for are the many issues of **House of Secrets**, **House of Mystery** and other DC horror titles that featured short stories by the above artists.

MARVEL COMICS OF THE 1970S

The hottest comic title of all time was published by Marvel Comics in August, 1975—the new **X-Men**. Since you couldn't overlook or forget this title if you wanted to, it won't be discussed in this survey of comics from the Seventies.

Since most collectors are also familiar with mainstream Marvels like **Spider-Man**, **Fantastic Four**, etc., we'll only look at the titles from the Seventies that might otherwise escape your attention.

MANTHING—Originally published in *Fear*, **Manthing** was one of the most ambitiously written Marvels of the Seventies. Steve Gerber turned in some truly weird stories here, and the Giant Size Annuals are some of the best. Howard the Duck was first hatched in these pages as well.

HOWARD THE DUCK—If your only experience with Howard the Duck has been the recent movie and current title revival, you have been robbed. If you really want to see why this character has survived all these years, read

B-BUT I THOUGHT
TH-THAT MY TITLE WAS
DOING GREAT...



LOOK AT IT
THIS WAY - YOU
WON'T HAVE TO SUFFER
THE SAME INDIGNITY
AS LIVING 70'S
TITLES!

the first seven issues. After these early issues, the title became erratic and sometimes disappointing.

WARLOCK—Warlock was Marvel's only hero more cosmic than the Silver Surfer. Jim Starlin's version of the character is especially fine. Besides his own book, you'll enjoy seeing how the character is handled in *Strange Tales*, the *Avengers* and the *Hulk*.

CAPTAIN MARVEL—Jim Starlin's issues are the only ones worth reading of this title. Truly excellent.

DEFENDERS—A title usually scorned and slammed by collectors, yet the issues by Gerber from this period (#s 20 through 40) are some of the best plotted Marvels of that decade.

OTHER COMPANIES

After the shake-out of the late Sixties, Marvel and DC pretty much dominated the Seventies. A new comic company, Atlas, published a slew of two and three issue titles before it went out of business in the mid-Seventies. Howard Chaykin's *Scorpion* is of some interest, as are a few other issues from that company.

Charlton comics gave us *Doomsday +1*, with early Byrne art and a good storyline. But Charlton's real contribution to fans of the Seventies was *E-Man* by Joe Staton. Backup strips by Byrne and Ditko make this one of the best non-Marvel/DC comics from that period.

SEVENTIES STINK-O-LA

Lest we sing the praises of the bygone comics of the Seventies too highly, let's also quickly point out that probably the most insipid comic stories of all time tended to appear in this decade.

Kirby had his hits, but **Devil Dinosaur**—although reputedly a favorite among working professionals in the industry—certainly wasn't a Seventies classic. DC utterly wasted the Golden Age Quality characters they inherited with the comic **Freedom Fighters**.

And while **SHAZAM** and the revival of **Captain Marvel** was just so-so, it certainly wasn't the biggest comic event of the Seventies as had been predicted.

And if you ever seriously dig through boxes of comics from the Seventies, you'll soon realize that Marvel was busy churning out dozens and dozens of trash titles such as **Dead of Night** and **Gunhawks**. The chief effect of all these Marvel reprint titles is that you soon realize there are many comic stories not worthy of reading again.

CRUISING THE SEVENTIES—TIPS FOR COLLECTORS

With these warnings aside, you should still consider cruising the Seventies for some comic greats.

If you want to investigate artists that either started or were most closely identified with this decade, then look for the work by Jim Starlin, Marshall Rogers, John Byrne,



Mike Golden, Mike Kaluta, Howard Chaykin, Jeff Jones, Barry Smith and Walt Simonson.

Also remember that there were many short-run titles that appeared in this decade. DC was wildly experimenting with dozens of new titles and concepts in an effort to recapture its number one position in the field. As a result, you can find some interesting titles that only lasted eight or nine issues and are easy to collect in their entirety.

One interesting phenomenon of this decade was both Marvel's and DC's attempts at experimenting with new comic book sizes, formats and prices. You can find a lot of 100-page DC titles from the Seventies that reprint some truly great stories.

Both Marvel and DC also began issuing treasury-sized comics in the Seventies. Because these giant "treasury editions" are hard to store and sell, they will probably become some of the scarcer comics from this period.

{Editor's Note: One additional interesting oddity were the crossover stories featuring both Marvel and DC heroes that appeared in some of these editions including ones in which Spider-Man meets Superman and Wonder Woman meets the Hulk.}

SEVENTIES SAVVY—HINTS FOR INVESTORS

If you decided to invest in 1970s comics, remember that almost every mainstream title from Marvel and DC was bought and stored in large quantities by dealers and collectors.

With the exception of underground comics and esoteric comic items, almost all comics from the Seventies are extremely common and in good supply.

Because there are so many Seventies comics, the investor should only buy books from this time period in Very Fine to Mint condition. Only comics in top-notch shape from the 1970s will interest future collectors, so don't waste your money on lesser condition books.

Remember that unlike recent comics from the Eighties, there will probably rarely be any rapid rise in collector activity in Seventies comics.

Perhaps the most profitable way to invest in Seventies comics is to watch the Eighties. This means when a character or company or artist becomes "hot" today, it can effect the sales and values of comics published 10 to 15 years ago.

For example, **Batman** and **Detective** issues from the 1970s disappear fast at conventions. This has only started happening since the recent success of Frank Miller's

revitalization of the character.

Sometimes a Seventies title is revived or reworked as a new comic. Sales of the old **Teen Titans** comics from the early 1970s, while not fantastic, have certainly increased since the **New Teen Titans** came on the scene in 1980.

Another approach to investing in the Seventies comics is to look beyond the mainstream titles and issues. For instance, you might try buying some offbeat titles for eventual resale.

For example, DC war titles and Marvel romance titles from the 1970s were collected only spottily in comparison to the superhero titles. As a result, mint copies of issues from a title like **Our Love Story** (a Marvel romance comic published from October of 1969 until February of 1976) are tough to locate. The #14 issue of that title, incidentally, featured a new story by Tarpe Mills, the very well liked artist of Miss Fury fame.

So although Seventies comics are plentiful, there are overlooked titles which might become in demand by specialized collectors in the future.

Investing in comics from the Seventies is not a get-rich quick approach, however. Most of these comics will only grow in value and demand after another ten to fifteen years.

So, yes, there is definitely money to be made in comics from the 1970s if you have patience. Pick your titles carefully, and go for top grade books.

THE WRAP UP—SEVENTIES STYLE

In the excitement of collecting new titles and discovering new artists, comic collectors can often forget about the past. And while the Seventies may not have the sexy allure of the Eighties nor the nostalgic comfort of the Sixties, comics from this decade rate a second closer look by both collector and investor.

And now that the Seventies comics are in plentiful supply and at prices better than ever before, it's time to take a look back to the past while we anticipate the future.

Back next month. **CF**

MIKE BENTON is the author of *Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit* and a leading expert on investments in rare comic books.

SILVER AGE

BY GERARD JONES

GENERATION GAP



What if Frank Miller drew The Dark Knight in the Silver Age?

Even as the course of comic book history has shifted and wandered, speeded and slowed, surged into new ground and doubled back on itself through the years, one watershed still looms in the background as the most influential turning point in its journeys: The public outcry against horror and crime comics in the early 1950s. An article could be written about how the shadow of censorship still lies over the field because of the memory of that furor. One could be written about how the death of more adult genres left the field wide open for conquest by the superheroes, who still have not relinquished their grip after thirty years. Another could be written about the angry, frustrated cult that grew up around the prematurely slaughtered EC Comics, and how that cult was the backbone of the underground comics movement of the late 1960s. Still another could be written about the desire of impudent young comics creators to push the boundaries of the medium in reaction against those long-ago attacks, or the rift that is widening between juvenile readers and adult fans because of the lack of middle ground comics after 1955.

This article isn't about any of those issues, yet it ties into all of them. This article is about the repercussions of some business decisions made in the decade after the public onslaught that almost killed comic books, and of some peculiar steps that continue to be taken to amend those decisions.

Every business, particularly a creative business, has to keep bringing in new blood if it hopes to flourish. Publishers are constantly on the lookout for new writers, newspaper syndicates for new cartoonists, movie producers for new actors and directors, gallery owners for new painters. Creative fields don't always feel very welcoming to newcomers trying to break in, partly because the stakes are high and the people with the money want to make sure the newcomer really is good and really is serious; partly because established talent, always insecure in such fickle businesses, feels threatened by upstarts. But even in lean times, even in times of economic pull-backs and conservatism, somebody is always out there looking for new talents in the arts. If nobody in the "establishment" is looking, at least there will always be new publishers, new producers, new galleries trying to break in, carrying new artists with them.

AN INDUSTRY IN DEEP FREEZE

But no medium in recent times has ever been hit as hard or knocked as low by economics as comic books were in the mid-'50s. Radio, around that same time, was undergoing a devastating metamorphosis, as the entire tradition of live comedy, drama and variety entertainment was crushed by television. But at least radio as a medium survived, and for every position lost to an actor a new one was opened up for a disc jockey.

But comic books were on the mat, stunned, the referee counting over them. For their first twenty years there were always new publishers rocketing in and out of view, new trends and titles and formats, new writers and artists. But so many distributors dropped comics, so many parents forbade their kids to buy them around 1953, 1954 and 1955 that a publisher would have had to be an idiot to try to launch an operation in that business, or expand an existing one. A lot of them figured one would have to be an idiot just to stay in it, and bailed out.

When the dust settled, just a few steady companies survived, a few that had been well-established at the beginning of the decade and published mainly innocent, juvenile material. Dell, DC and Archie predominated, but even they generally published less than they had before. Charlton, Atlas and ACG were barely alive, and apparently spiralling toward oblivion. Harvey hung on by its fingernails, Fawcett dropped everything but Dennis the Menace. Quality, EC, Lev Gleason, all the rest, were history. The big market was for funny animals, followed by teenage humor and westerns. Romance survived, but was treated with such contempt by its publishers that it began to die. War and science fiction struggled along, but in pretty diluted form. DC discovered that the little boys who missed their meatier action comics were becoming reinterested in superheroes, and so--tentatively--they explored reviving and revamping the proven successes of that genre.

Nothing new was being tried. Why should it be? Everybody was looking for openings into other lines of work, either trying to protect against what seemed like the inevitable death of the medium or at least trying to augment their failing incomes until things got better. With no hope of expansion, so little hope of any future at all, few people were inclined to take on anything new and untested. Certainly no one in the business wanted to hire any new talent. It was hard enough just finding enough work for loyal old staffers to keep them out of the unemployment offices. Too many artists and writers were trying to make do with very little work, or getting into occupations beneath their abilities. Many of those who were able to get numerous assignments found their page rates lower than before, so they tended to work themselves too hard.

EARLY THAW

By the early 1960s, the situation was looking up a little. DC was having some success with its new-style superheroes, and other companies were beginning to follow them into that field. But even then, the actual expansion of the field was minimal. Both DC and Atlas/Marvel tended to scrap marginal science

fiction and western comics to make room for their hot-selling superheroes, rather than launching more titles. Archie and Harvey tried some tentative expansion, to good effect. But at about the same time, Dell Books sold out their interest in comics to their printing company, and the less ritzy Gold Key line was born.

The result of all this was that for at least a decade hardly any new writers or artists entered the comic book field. The wave of youngsters--among them Dick Giordano, Steve Ditko, John Buscema, Arnold Drake--who had been hired in the bustling years of the early 1950s were still the junior members of the



In the Silver Age Batman may have been Kryptonian too...

SILVERAGE

comic book community. Even the boldest new creations were being handled by veterans like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Gardner Fox, John Broome. Weaker-selling comics, which might once have been handed over to new kids in order to give them a chance to develop, were instead dumped on production assistants and hangers-on who had no ambitions in—and no skill for—comics. Thus the editing of a romance comic might be handed to a veteran receptionist, the writing of science fiction backup stories to an editor's untalented brother.

SEARCHING FOR NEW BLOOD

By the middle of the 1960s, the amount of work available was beginning to grow visibly. Partly this was because a resurgent comic book market was actually making new titles possible. Partly it was because artists like Jack Kirby and Gil Kane were able to draw better rates again, and thus reduce their workloads in order to turn in better work on the few series they re-

tained. But even then editors resisted hiring new people. No youngsters had been trained in the field for years, after all, which meant that a scramble to find newcomers would mean thrusting some very untrained rookies into highly visible positions. In any case, editors preferred to give opportunities to respected old colleagues whenever possible. Thus it was, for example, that when Stan Lee decided to enlist some new artists for his Marvel Comics line in 1964 and 1965, he tracked down men with whom he'd worked in the past but who had been unable to weather the hard times with him: Bill Everett, Gene Colan, John Buscema, John Romita.

The problem of filling new artistic openings was thus relatively easy. But filling writing positions was another matter entirely. There hadn't been many pure writers in comics in the early days, since the business originally followed the newspaper strip system of publishing writer/artists. There never can be as many writers as artists in comics anyway, since one writer can produce far more scripts than one artist can draw. And some of



the writers who had been in the business and then left had moved on to bigger and more sophisticated things; they weren't inclined to return to comics.

But editors began to need new writers. In the past, comic book writers had been drawn from the pulp fiction world, in which comic book editors had plenty of contacts. But the pulp world had withered, those writers drawing off into the slick magazines and the paperback original fields, and time had cost comic editors many of their contacts. The juvenility and super-heroic emphasis that had come to distinguish comics since the mid-50s had also driven the medium far from the concerns of the men who wrote mysteries, westerns, sophisticated science fiction and grown-up humor. And the financial future of comics still didn't look as promising as it once had. The old sources for writers were simply dead.

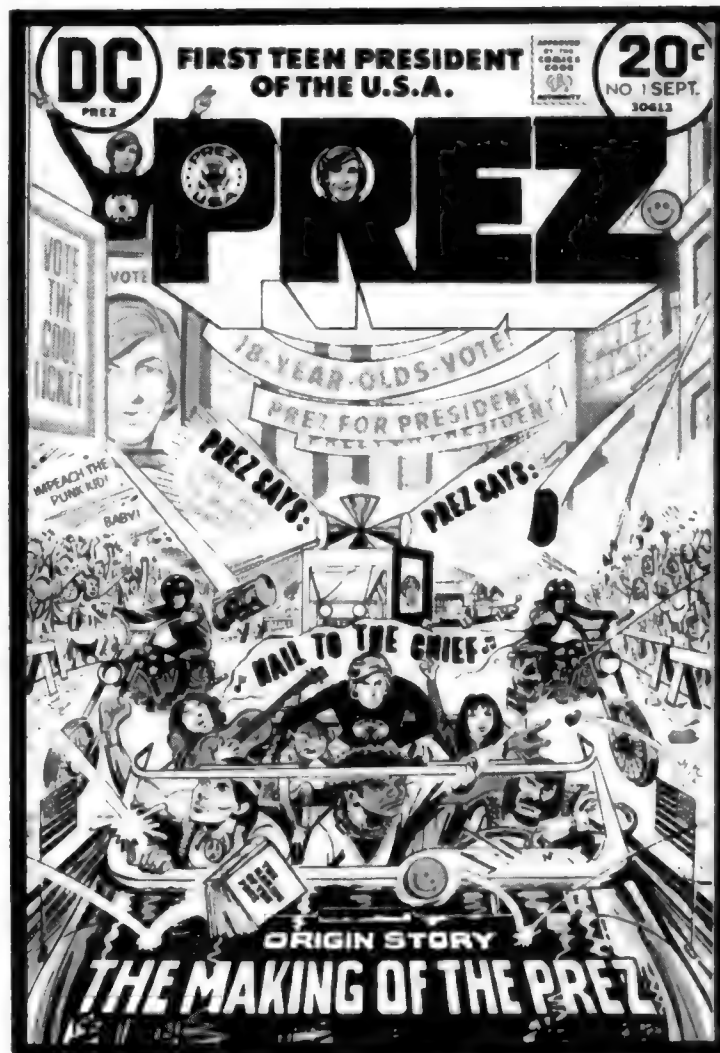
Since editors, in most cases, must have imagined their new writers handling minor series and backup stories, they may not have felt much need to find someone really accomplished. It might be enough that a writer had enthusiasm and a knowledge of comics. The latter virtue (if it is a virtue) was becoming particularly important, because readers were showing a preference for complex continuity and a large body of lore around all their heroes. It would be good for a new writer to know that lore.

FAN BOYS TAKE OVER

So it was that editors went for writers to the only source they could find: Fandom. Precocious kids and nostalgic adults who had shown through their fanzines, their letters, their unsolicited submissions, that they could do a decent job churning out comic book stories according to editorial specifications. And so it was that in the few years of the mid-1960s, Mort Weisinger hired E. Nelson Bridwell, Jim Shooter and Cary Bates; Stan Lee hired Roy Thomas and Gary Friedrich; and Dick Giordano at Charlton hired Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates (along with some promising young artists and writer/artists).

The gamble paid off better than the editors could have expected. What those fans lacked in polish they often made up for in passion and devotion to detail. Although what they wrote might not have pleased the more mainstream comic book audiences of decades past, much of it thrilled the hardcore fans who were becoming a major part of the comic book audience in the late 1960s. And there were other fans, waiting in the wings. DC editor Julie Schwartz had a whole stable of literate fans writing in his letter pages, many of them--Mike Friedrich, Marty Pasko, Marv Wolfman, and others--dreaming of becoming comic book writers. Given time to mature in minor series, they seemed to have the makings of a good new generation of writers.

But the decade of no-hiring was about to catch up to the comic book business. All at once, a whole generation of comic book writers--those who'd been in the field since the beginning, in the 1930s--hit retirement age. Mort Weisinger lost Edmond Hamilton, Jerry Siegel and Otto Binder at about the same time. John Broome cut back sharply on his productivity for Julie Schwartz, and when Gardner Fox tried to increase his workload to compensate, his writing fell apart so badly that he seems to



have written himself out of a job. Others--Bill Finger, Arnold Drake, Dave Wood--either left comics altogether or at least superheroes specifically. Stan Lee, who for years had been Marvel's only significant writer, cut his workload back sharply to take on more editorial duties.

The result was that the new fan-writers who should have been given an apprenticeship under the guidance of the veterans were suddenly thrust into the spotlight. To make matters worse, the slickest, most professional of those neophytes, Jim Shooter, left the field at the same time. With the retirement of Mort Weisinger, E. Nelson Bridwell took on largely editorial duties. Of the other youngsters, Steve Skeates and Gary Friedrich were not especially prolific. Suddenly, it befell Roy Thomas, Cary Bates and Denny O'Neil to take over most of the comics of Marvel and DC. And both companies were undergoing major expansions of their lines.

The job was clearly too big, and so a horde of new fan-writers had to be pulled in with scarcely any experience. The names of Wolfman, Wein, Friedrich, Pasko, MacGregor, Maggin, Englehart, Gerber and others known only from letter pages were sud-

SILVERAGE



denly appearing everywhere, on every major comic book, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With them came a wave of new artists, for the pool of veterans willing to return to comics had finally run out, and fans who could draw were being drafted right and left. In a space of a few years, the comic book business had been transformed from an industry of conservative and shell-shocked old men with backgrounds in pulps and advertising, into a playground of wild-eyed fans set loose among the icons of which they had been in awe while they were growing up. Couple that with the irreverence, lack of humility, and impracticality that characterized the youth culture of that time, and you have a picture of comic books in the '70s.

It was a mess. Comics have never been more chaotic, more inconsistent, more self-indulgent than in the 1970s. There were flashes of brilliance, moments of individual expression and visionary art such as comic books had never seen before. But there were oceans of adolescent wailings, tons of petrified old power fantasies, and scarcely any mature craftsmanship. The makings of something great would keep raising its head, only to be swept under by fan concerns, inconsistent editorial policies or rampant personnel changes. It was in those years, I be-

lieve, that the mainstream of American kids—who had already begun drifting away from comics in the 1960s and would have had to be actively wooed to be kept as buyers—were soundly alienated from the comic book medium. There was no one left to sustain the medium but fanatics and collectors. As a consequence, comics are still weighed under by obsessive continuity, adolescent emotionality and an isolationistic ghetto mentality.

In recent years, the situation has begun to change. The youngsters of the late 1960s have generally either left the field or matured as creators. With them holding down the big titles, newcomers now are able to work through a real apprenticeship. Independent publishers grew up to provide an antidote to the fan/corporate mentality that took over Marvel and DC in the last decade. Both Dick Giordano at DC and Jim Shooter at Marvel have taken steps to salvage the good and minimize the bad in modern comics. But still, so much of what is lacking and limiting in today's comics can be traced back to the "generation gap" in comic book writers at the end of the 1960s. So much can still be seen as a reaction or a counter-reaction to the crisis of the mid-1950s.

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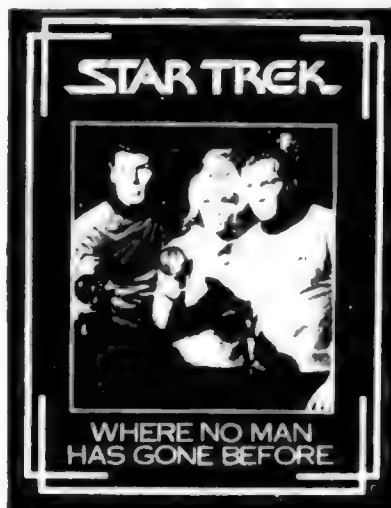
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PUNISHER

THE WAR GOES ON

BY JAMES VAN HISE

In an age when Rambo, Cobra and other vigilantes flash across the screen met justice with tactical weaponry, The Punisher had to return.

The Punisher is really a Marine deserter named Frank Castle. Castle was traumatized by the murder of his wife and children when they witnessed a gangland hit in Central Park. On leave at the time of the incident, Castle went AWOL to track down those responsible for the brutal murders. Possessing multiple decorations from his five year tour of duty in Vietnam, when he went underground to rid society of criminals was just before he was going to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

"The Punisher is an obsessed personality," observes Carl Potts, the editor of the new Punisher series from Marvel. Potts also edited last year's **Punish-**

er limited series, which garnered both great sales and critical acclaim for the first solo outing of this man who walks alone. "He's been using skills that he learned in Vietnam to avenge himself on the criminal world in general. I liken him somewhat to Solomon Kane (a Robert E. Howard created character who also appeared in one of Marvel's limited series), who was sort of The Punisher of Puritan times. He was really into righteous indignation —anything that went against his religion, he'd use deadly force on. But I think that in Kane's case he was using his religious dogma as a justification for his love of adventure and conflict. I think that to a certain extent with The Punisher that may be the case, although not as much as with Kane. You can see someone avenging themselves on the actual people who killed his family, but The Punisher carries it on to all criminals. So obviously he is ob-

sessed. I think the reason for that obsession may partly be because Frank Castle had no real direction in his life, no other interests, and maybe he was just an adventurous spirit looking for justification. That doesn't mean that he is not well intentioned or that his crusade isn't genuine. He really does believe that he's doing good by taking on these criminal types," Potts stresses, "but there's obviously other things going on there. We address that a bit in the new series where he wonders if perhaps he's also got a deathwish to punish himself for not protecting his family — and that this might perhaps be a strange attempt to rejoin them."

The writer who will be interpreting and exploring the many facets of The Punisher in his new series is Mike Baron. Previously Baron created both **Nexus** and **The Badger** for Capital Comics (they are now published by First Comics) and contributed

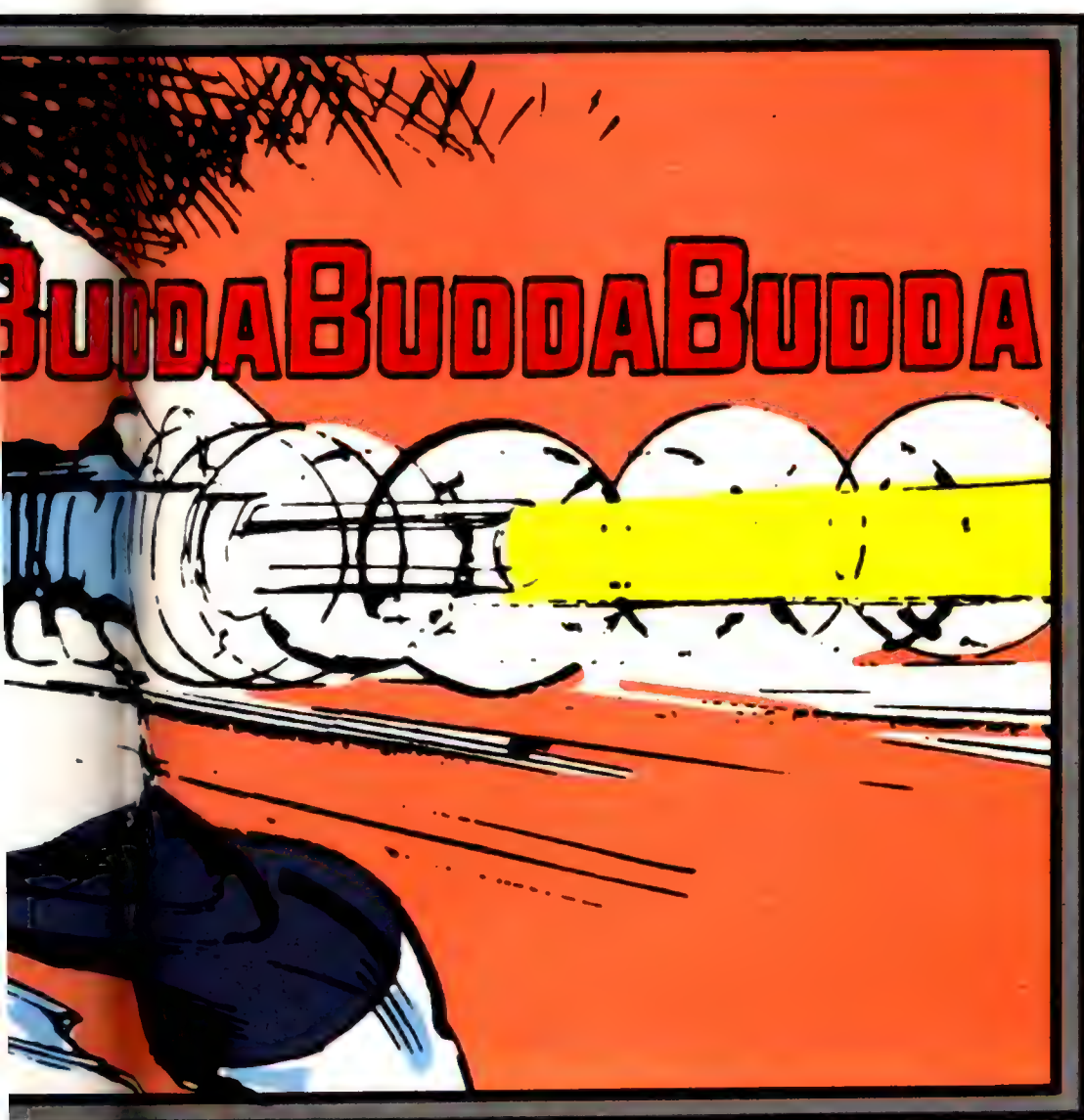
BADGER



"You don't have to
wait for something
to happen..."



...he'll make it happen!"



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stories to Marvel's anthology series **Amazing High Adventure**. Now, besides his continuing involvement with his own creations, he is the scripter on DC Comics new **Flash**.

"Prior to my writing him, my main image of The Punisher was based on the series that Steven Grant and Mike Zeck did," Baron explains. "It had a certain mood and rhythm which I admired and which I've tried to capture in my own way. The Punisher is a single-minded gentleman. He's out to bust major criminals, which makes him very easy to write and difficult to write because he's always in motion. You don't have to wait for something to happen — he's going to make something happen. It's difficult because somebody who is so single-minded can appear simple minded, and I don't want that to happen. The challenge to me is to keep the heat on and keep The Punisher working. At the same time I want to make him complex and believable — as believable as an obsessive-compulsive individual can be," Baron adds.

THE COMING OF THE PUNISHER

The Punisher five issue limited series last year produced very strong sales and indicated that the character had finally come into his own after years of turning up in other heroes' comics, such as in **Spider-Man** and **Daredevil** where he was as often portrayed as a villain as a hero. It all depended on who was writing the story. The Punisher first appeared in **Amazing Spider-Man** #129 while his origin was presented in **Marvel Preview** #2. At one point in the recent history of the character,

HAPPY HAL'S HOWLINGS-

Do comic book companies really have traditions? Do they respect their own classics except when it is time to repackage and resell them at a premium price? For the past couple of days an odd thought has been bothering me. Both Marvel and DC have very recently celebrated anniversaries. That is normally a time when you would expect a company to pay homage to its roots and to take some, at least superficial steps, to honor the creative work that was done.

And I'm not even talking about the controversies involving Jack Kirby or the way in which Stan the Man has virtually been given the far-famed corporate Siberia treatment (and some other time, remind me to tell you the interesting story of the V.P. of GM that had a whole building constructed for him just to stick him in Siberia!), but the way in which characters are handled.

For their celebration, Marvel did very little to invoke the ghosts of the past, vibrant as their images may still be, preferring instead to construct a whole New Universe. Well that Universe certainly won't be having many birthdays as Marvel plans to kill off all but one, maybe two, of those titles by the end of summer. And the survivor, featuring Starbrand, will be a bimonthly at that. There were no special reprints or oversized repackagings of the original books, just a Marvel Saga which even rewrites the history it pretends to report. (Not to different than many if not all histories of the "real world.") The only regular reprint titles that Marvel has going only represent stories from the past fifteen years or so not the last 25. I have wished for years that Marvel would start a half dozen or so baxter format books that would reprint the first fifty or so issues of each of their major series such as Spidey, the FF, the Avengers and so on. Each book would present one series and run the fifty, and then start to recycle the whole thing. These should be made available on the stands as well as in the shops. The books would capture two groups, the older, nostalgic fans like Ol' Happy Hal who have never had the opportunity to buy these stories on good paper, and the newer fans who wonder what came before they started reading...what all the fuss is about when people talk about Ditko and Kirby and all the rest. Since the more casual readers, still a big part of the comic book buying public, turn over every three or four years, recycling the fifty every three or four years would work perfectly. The benefit to readers is obvious. The benefit to Marvel? Lots of saved costs including paying much to the creators, preparing the plates, color separations and so on. Particularly on the second and future go-rounds!

DC owns most of the historic tradition of comic books. The original company was in there in the early days and over the years managed to acquire the properties of several of their competitors, namely Quality, Fawcett (at least their Big Red Cheese and company) and Charlton. Granted they made a mess of the Quality characters about a dozen years ago, killed off the Capt and are now in the process of destroying the Charlton heroes (how could you do that, Dick?), but they still do own most of the important comic book heroes that were ever published. To honor their anniversary they killed off their roots.

Most of the big gun '40s superstars are gone now; there is a whole new universe and the past is seemingly safely buried. Whether this was done because the copyrights are about to expire on the originals and they needed a whole new crop that would be safe for a few more decades has never been addressed. Flashy trappings and all, the company might simply not have had a choice in the matter. The edict may have come down from the boys in the legal department, or worse yet, Warner's legal department. The net result is that DC has no older heroes. Their traditions have been uprooted and when all of the smoke clears, and the initial excitement dies down, there will be little left to cheer about. This is already pretty obvious on the sales figures for the latest issues of such characters as Wonder Woman, Superman and Batman. And when Miller (he's already said he won't work for DC), Byrne and Perez finally complete their stints on their books, then what happens?

It wasn't enough to destroy their own characters, they have gotten pretty good at killing off everybody else's too. Last decade they made hash out of such Quality classics as Uncle Sam, the Black Condor, the Ray and so on; they have just completed the demolition of Captain Marvel and are one-by-one changing the Charlton heroes beyond recognition. (Sorry about those Capt comments, Roy. I know the spot you are in. I has been decided that the humorous style of C.C. Beck doesn't sell anymore and you are trying to make the Big Red Cheese more realistic. But just how do you do that with a kid that got the power to turn into an adult from a wizard sitting in a subway tunnel who taught him to say the word Shazam, an acronym of the names of a bunch of old Greek gods with one Hebrew king thrown in for the hell of it. And his enemies are Siva-na and Mr. Mind? Really?) Ditko wouldn't recognize the directions that The Question and the Blue Beetle have been forced into and Captain Atom is just about a mirror image of his original self, sort of like when the Star Trek crew went into that alternate universe. Don't even ask what they did to the poor Peacemaker, a gentle diplomat fighting to keep the world peaceful.

Well, you get the idea. A sad way to celebrate the past. At least that's the opinion of....

HAPPY HAL

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The Punisher was portrayed as a maniacal vigilante who even went after traffic offenders with lethal force.

"There was a period in one of the Spider-Man books where The Punisher went berserk and was shooting jaywalkers," Potts recalls. "We covered that in the limited series by saying that during one of his stays in prison his enemies had been spiking his food with various substances that enhance paranoia in order to make him look bad and either be killed or put away for good."

When the mini-series ended, The Punisher was free of prison and on his own again. Even the authorities were no longer hunting him, at least for the time being. This limited series also established the growing popularity of the character, with sales both strong on the newsstands and in the direct market. Potts went to Jim Shooter with the idea for a regular series and was given the go-ahead. (When **COMICS FEATURE** polled its readers as to their favorite hero, The Punisher scored quite high.)

"After I got the okay, I started thinking about the creative team I wanted on the book. I'd enjoyed a lot of Mike Baron's work I'd seen from other publishers as well as for the few short stories he had done for me on the late, lamented, **Amazing High Adventure**. He just has a unique approach that I really like," Potts notes. "It's very gutsy, terse and hard. At the same time he has these intriguing and often humorous insights into things that are a little offbeat. It makes it a little more interesting. Under the guise of doing real kick-ass type stories, he often has some real interesting things to say and I'm not sure how many of his readers actually pick up on some of what he's ei-

MIKE BARON'S OTHER VIGILANTE

Although more people will see Mike Baron's work in the new **Punisher** series from Marvel, the writer is equally proud of his work on a series he created a few years ago. The **Badger** is currently being published by First Comics and Baron is really excited by upcoming events in the series.

"Beginning in **Badger** #26 there's two very important things happening with that issue," Baron reveals. "One is that artist Bill Reinhold is inking his own work for the first time and it's unbelievably exciting. I really want to alert people that they'd better get ready for the art in this book. The second thing is that the book is going to full process color, like **Nexus** (another First Comics title). So the total look of the book is going to change drastically. It's going to be as exciting a change as when **Master of Kung Fu** brought Paul Gulacy back to the book with a totally new look."



"He's going great guns on it...."



ther consciously or subconsciously saying in some of his work. I think that some of them are just getting into the fact that it has lots of action. So I contacted him to see if he was interested and he was very interested."

The artist for **The Punisher** is well known for his collaborations with Frank Miller but has never pencilled a series regularly before.

"Klaus Janson was in the office one day and I talked to him to see if he was interested," Potts recalls. "He wasn't sure about producing a monthly book because it's a difficult grind for someone, particularly if they're doing three disciplines — pencilling, inking and coloring. But I'd always thought that a periodi-

cal on a regular six week basis would be interesting to try and it hadn't really been done before. When other people have published books 8 times a year, it would be bimonthly most of the year and then monthly during the summer, whereas I was interested in keeping a regular schedule of producing books every six weeks." Potts received approval for this schedule and Janson agreed to do the book as it gave him the extra time he needed to do all of the work on it that he wanted to do.

"The thing that attracted me to **The Punisher**," Janson explains, "is that, for me, it combines the familiar with the unfamiliar. There are city scenes and action, which I'm pretty good at,

and there are also unfamiliar things for me to learn, like armaments and hardware. So there's personal expansion for me and also stuff that I'm good at, which I hope will make for a good-looking book. I'm trying to develop my storytelling into a more graphics-oriented style and combine the book's action with a dark, shadowy mood like I used in **Daredevil**."

Potts asked Mike Baron to come up with some ideas for the first several issues once they were settled on an artist so that they could see which direction the series would go in.

"He's going great guns on it, happy with what he's doing. I think it's going to be very popular with the fans."

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WHERE THE PUNISHER TREADS, VIOLENCE FOLLOWS

Since The Punisher is a non-super character who operates largely in more realistic settings fighting realistic menaces, the villains he will be facing in his own series will be more realistic criminals, much as he encountered in the limited series.

"They're non-super criminals, but they're still big criminals. The first issue's called 'Marching Powder' and it involves an international cocaine ring. It starts off in Manhattan where he begins climbing the cocaine ladder and he keeps being accosted by crack addicts who try to rip him off. He climbs the rungs of the organization until he reaches the top, or so he thinks.

"By the second issue he's reached a huge plant in the jungles of Bolivia. It's run by a Vietnamese general who's an international criminal mastermind, and his men are armed up the yin-yang. This story involves some of Frank Castle's old compatriots from his Vietnam days."

In the third issue, The Punisher is war weary and travels to Kansas to try to start a new life, but his old way of life won't allow that.

"He wants to get away and establish a normal life for himself," Baron continues. "He travels to the midwest and tries to get normal relationships going. But situations pop up where the motivation to be The Punisher surfaces at every turn. He can't get away from it." What he encounters is a band of right-wing rebels not unlike the posse comitatus. "They're all-American, right-wing bank robbers who rob banks to finance a Fourth Reich, but they're not really Nazis.



The story in *Badger* #26 is also a bit on the offbeat side, dealing with a villain called The Roachwrangler!

"They only come out at night!" Baron melodramatically explains. "An army of cockroaches, all under the mysterious power of one man! The Badger must crawl through the Chicago sewers to corral The Roachwrangler! The Roachwrangler is a hideous character, he is by no means ordinary. And while the cockroaches are ordinary, there's a billion of them!

"When this is over, I think there's a fillin and then begins a three-part story we call the Grand Master trilogy. It's action adventure all the way. It's my version of a full blown mythical martial arts film in which they get sucked in to this competition between two grand masters, each of whom claims to be the true representative of kung fu art. It's kind of based on a real thing that's going on in the world of martial arts right now in which the two supposed self-proclaimed grand masters of Wing Chiun are each calling the other one a charlatan and a fraud and are



They're more into being right-wing survivalists." Violence follows where The Punisher treads.

Frank Castle's excursion to Kansas convinces him that he can't turn his back on reality and he returns to Manhattan where issue four picks up with a story called "The Rev."

"It has to do with a Jim Jones-type of temple operating out of New York," Baron states, making it clear that his story has a template in reality. "But instead of being into mass suicide like Jim Jones was, the leader of this cult, Sam Smith, thinks he has enough weapons to hold off a government attack!" This is a reverend who comes out with guns blazing! But Baron is quite taken with this character as he's not your usual stereotype of a corrupt religious leader. "He's such a good character that I might even allow him to survive! One of the things Jim Jones said was that he was a faith healer, and there is evidence that he did some good. There is evidence that some people can heal without traditional medicine. Sam Smith is a mixed bag, he is evil and megalomaniacal but, on the other hand, he does have a real gift for healing." The second part of the story in issue

#5 even shifts locales to Ghiana. "But unlike Jim Jones, he's not into suicide—he's into fighting back." Where The Punisher treads....

Issues 6 and 7 are another two-part story which takes The Punisher back from the wilds of Ghiana to the wilds of New Jersey. But unlike the limited series, these stories are all unrelated, except for the fact that they involve The Punisher. "There's continuity in that he remembers what he did in the previous issue, but it's not one long involved storyline."

Due to the violent nature of The Punisher's existence, he is not going to be escaping from his conflicts unscathed. After all, he's not a superhero!

"During the seven issues so far that I've written, he does sustain some fairly serious injuries," Baron reveals. "He wears body armor which has the ability to prevent anything short of a Teflon-coated bullet from piercing it by absorbing that impact over a broader area. But even wearing body armor, if you get hit with a slug, it can easily break a bone. I think he's got to suffer a cracked collarbone in one of the issues, as well as numerous stabs, punches, gouges and shocks."



COVERT ACTION

Unlike most characters in the Marvel Universe, The Punisher carries out his one man anti-crime wave from behind the scenes, without the accompanying publicity and newspaper headlines which once plagued him.

"He uses disguises quite a bit, and aliases," Baron explains. "He's got dozens of aliases and does whatever he has to. The Punisher only appears in the costume and with the bazooka when he really wants to make an impact and he's convinced that this is the only way to do it. He's not running around in that costume all the time."

While it has been clear that The Punisher's expertise with exotic armaments comes from his training in Vietnam, which hasn't been as clear is his source of these state-of-the-art weapons. They're not exactly the sort of gear you can pick up at Guns-R-Us. Thus the source will be revealed to be two experts in the world of arms who have been working for The Punisher behind-the-scenes all along.

"Microchip and Microchip Junior are the father and son team responsible for The Punisher's high tech weaponry," Baron reveals. "They built his battlewagon and put together his computer hookups."

Although The Punisher is a vigilante who uses his skills to deal harshly with the criminal underworld, the moral issues raised by his pursuit of justice will not really form a basis for what this series will explore, Baron states.

"I think that's been dealt with so frequently over and over again in some of my own books, such as **Nexus** and **Badger**, as well as in **The Vigilante** over at



sending their students to attack the other guy. It starts out like that but it ends on an island in the South China Sea. We've been working overtime choreographing the most fabulous kung fu stunts ever. It's a mini-series within the series. We're pulling out all the exotic weapons and the action is going to be flamboyant, outrageous and gruesome, but it's also going to be based on reality."

The Badger is consistently in the top ten of the best-selling independent comics and First Comics has a Badger graphic novel in the works. Baron was already doing **Nexus** for Capital Comics (the original publishers of both **The Badger** and **Nexus**) when they approached him about doing another series. He wanted to do a comic about an ancient druid while they preferred something that would sell—a costumed crime fighter. "I said, why would anyone put on a costume and fight crime? They'd have to be nuts! And that's how the



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DC, that I'm not interested in discussing that in **The Punisher**. In his own mind, The Punisher is convinced that he's doing the right thing. So there's no issue there that he's going to get into an argument with somebody about."

But the nature of The Punisher, that of one vigilante versus the system, seems to be what has fi-

nally caused the character to come into his own.

"I attribute it partly to the quality of the limited series and partly to the tempo of the times," says Baron. "The Punisher has been around a lot longer than the Rambo movies and for my money he's a better character than Rambo. But look at the popularity of Rambo. I'm writing these

stories to appeal to myself and I can only hope that the readers also like the same things I do here. I'm trying to write a violent, downbeat, film noir type of story, and I expect that it will attract readers who are mostly male looking for realistic action."

Baron feels that he has a firm handle on the character and sees The Punisher as someone who knows that while he may continue winning the battles, that the war is just too big for one man to ever completely triumph.

"I don't think he could ever feel that he's actually having an impact. It's just that this is what he does and he's going to do it the best that he can and go after the biggest crooks that he can. He doesn't kid himself, though. I don't think that he's an idealist at all."

The Punisher's ability to grapple with reality and make the best of it is exemplified in **Spider-Man Annual #15** (1981) when he is arrested and taken to jail. "This is a guy whose mission in life is to kill criminals," Potts states, "and if you're going to be put away, you might as well try to look on the bright side of it—that you're going to be surrounded by your prey." This was especially evident in the first issue of **The Punisher** limited series where Frank Castle strode the halls of Ryker's Island Penitentiary like a tiger, and it was Mike Zeck who brought that image to powerful life.

"I think Mike's artwork is excellent," Potts states, "and there's a good chance that Mike will be doing an inventory issue of **The Punisher**." But Potts didn't consider Mike for the art chores on this new series. "For a regular, on-going title, I don't think that

Mike could handle the deadlines. I worked with Mike on the limited series so I know of which I speak. The deadlines on that series kept being pushed back to accommodate Mike. The information to the contrary which appeared in **The Comic Journal** was totally erroneous. Mike really put himself into it but that first issue took Mike about a year to pencil and color. I was really blown away by it but you can't really have someone take that long to produce a book in a limited series."

Regarding future plot lines, Baron states that they will not include a full blown origin issue.

"I mention it in almost every issue, but to restage those events? No. They've been staged sufficiently. There's no need to redo them. I hate flashbacks and recaps."

While there are tentative plans to reunite **The Punisher** with **Daredevil** in a crossover story, details for that reunion have not yet been worked out. "I still have to talk to Ann Nocenti, the writer of **Daredevil**, about this."

Another natural for **The Punisher** to encounter would be the Kingpin, but Baron so far has no plans in that direction, not that he doesn't consider it to be an entertaining idea. "I certainly like the Kingpin and I think it would be one hell of a battle. It could take months. The Kingpin is a hard guy to get behind."

But Baron promises that **The Punisher** will be filled with intense action and surprises in the months ahead.

"It's going to be kind of a downbeat film noir series with things blowing up in your face. Just maximum mayhem with as much carnage as I can shovel in there, and that they'll allow!"

Badger was born! Jeffrey Butler was the original artist on **The Badger** but he works for TSR Hobbies now. He's supposed to do one story a year but he's had one script for 16 months. He does great stuff but Bill is the **Badger** artist now and he does great stuff, too. But Bill needs a break now and 'hen....

"Bill came over with the very first First issue in '85. He lives in Chicago and we get together fairly frequently. He's as committed to **The Badger** as I am, which means that we should both be committed to a mental institution, but we feel like we're just getting started. The stuff that's coming up is the most exciting ever, art-wise and story-wise."

Unfortunately, First comics are not distributed through normal magazine outlets and can normally only be found in comic book specialty stores.



5 JANUARY 1986

COMICS

ON FILM

BY GERAUD JONES

SUPERMAN

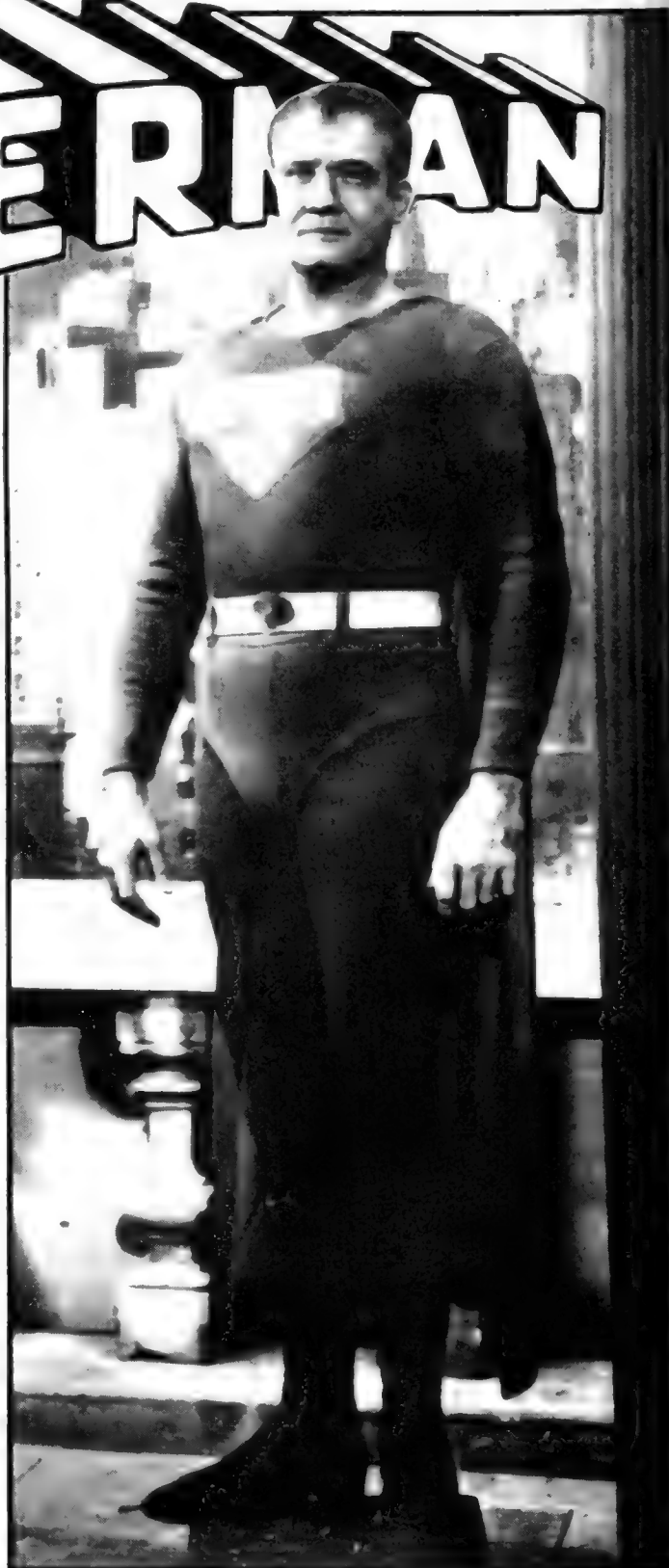
ON TV

PART ONE

The faces are as familiar as relatives at a reunion, and maybe more so. The a family that these people belong to, though, encompasses three decades of American tv fans, plus assorted millions around the globe. There's Robert Shayne, grayer now, but looking fit enough to handle crime-fighting as the stalwart Inspector Henderson of the Metropolis Police Force. There's Noel Neill, still petite and pretty, her sparkling blue eyes creased a bit with the years, her voice the same as in her days as an "ace reporter." And there is Jack Larson, matured from hyperactive youth to creative manhood, his crew-cut gone in favor of a slightly longer fashion that tends toward salt and pepper.

It is a trio of survivors of television's most popular and long-lasting adventure series, "The Adventures of Superman." And though the last show was filmed over twenty-five years ago, the popularity has not decreased. For better or worse, actors Shayne, Neill and Larson will be known probably for all time as their tv alter-egos, Inspector Henderson, Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen.

But like mild-mannered Clark Kent, each of these performers had a "secret identity," a life far different from the images captured in 104 episodes of a children's television show.





The syndicated series, produced independently and sponsored by Kellogg's cereals, was an immediate hit from the time it first hit the airwaves. The star, George Reeves, became an instant celebrity, and was immutably typecast as the Man of Steel, a factor which doubtless contributed to his suicide in 1959. To a lesser extent, the other performers in the show suffered the same fate: no producer or casting agent could accept them as anything but their characters on **Superman**.

SUPERMAN'S GIRL FRIEND

Noel Neill, the once-and-forever Lois Lane, goes back with that character even before the tv series. The five foot two inch redhead began performing in the 1940s, doing parts in films like **Here Come the Waves** with Bing Crosby, the "Henry Aldrich" series, and a string of serials and comedies for low-budget producer Sam Katzman. When Katzman moved to Columbia to make the fifteen-chapter serial "Superman," he cast the young actress as the Daily Planet's best reporter. The year was 1948; the first Superman was an athletic actor named Kirk Alyn.

"I hate to say this," says Noel with a smile, "now that George is gone, but I think Kirk made a better Superman. George hated athletics, and it was difficult for him to get into shape. Kirk liked it. There was a hamminess about him, swooping off into whatever. George was a good actor who'd done good things, but at the time, it was embarrassing for him, a guy running around in what looked like his underwear."

Noel Neill followed this with the second screen appearance of the Man of Steel, **Atom Man Vs. Superman** in 1950, again with Kirk Alyn. Strangely, when the tv show began production in 1951 (it did not air until 1953), she was not called on to reprise her reporter role.

"I've no idea why," she muses. "They didn't approach anybody from the films, not me, or Kirk, or Tommy Bond, who played Jimmy Olsen. In those days, the business was very scattered. The producer of the first season, Bob Maxwell, probably didn't know Kirk and I did the serials, because they weren't publicized a lot. When you worked on the Columbia "B" lot where Sam Katzman made all his films, you'd never even read about the films in the trades. It was just a job."

The owners of the Superman character protected the image with miserly ferocity. Once production of the tv series began, the Columbia serials disappeared from the screens, never to be seen again. Noel Neill worked in small parts in big pictures such as **American in Paris**, and large parts in low-budget films until the late spring of 1953. Producer Maxwell had been replaced by Whitney Ellsworth, "Whit" called Noel to replace Phyllis Coates, who played Lois Lane in the first season. Coates had other roles to pursue, but Maxwell's departure was a bit more forced. The Kellogg's people decided Maxwell's violent shows were too grim for children, and wanted a more circumspect producer. Also, according to Noel, "He was the 'bad guy.' He'd promised George a percentage, a piece of the action, and he didn't have the right to give it away. So George worked for nothing on those first 26. New York found out, pulled him out of there, and put Whit in."



Though the show continued its amazing popularity, there were few benefits for Noel. Certainly the one-dimensional Lois Lane didn't stretch her acting abilities. "No," she says tiredly, "no, because it was a children's show. You couldn't have things too involved. They've said, 'All the scripts were alike; they just changed the names of the heavies.' They concentrated on the special effects, the heavies, the robots. It was just 13 weeks' work." No one got rich off 1950s television, either. The most Noel ever made was \$225 per episode. "We got residuals for a short time, up until about 1965. Our salary contract covered two runs, so we got nothing more for those; on the third and fourth run you'd get \$35 at most. The fifth and sixth were covered by one payment."

The Superman cast was a family on film only. Though the actors were friends on set, they usually went their different ways after a season's shooting was complete. "I spent most of my time at home with my husband Bill. Jack Larson and I kept in touch, because we live fairly close. Bob Shayne lived out in the Valley at the time. And George...George was going with this woman for several years, this little romance which not too many people approved of, but was his life, not ours. Probably that's why we were all such good friends. When you only see each other thirteen weeks out of a year and a half, you don't build deep friendships. Once it closed down for the season, we never knew if we'd make any more. We'd go our separate ways, then suddenly our agent would call and say, 'They're going to make 26 more.'"

Kellogg's commercials with the Superman cast were filmed at the time, but Lois was never allowed in them. The reason? No one could figure out how to put Clark Kent (or Superman) at the breakfast table with Lois and not have it look unseemly. "The morals seem to have changed a little bit," grins Noel, obviously referring to the new series of movies in which Lois and Superman became much more intimate. "But that was sad. We made so little money, and I was looking forward to making a little more." Evidently, in that more innocent age, no one saw anything peculiar about Clark Kent breakfasting with young Jimmy Olsen.

After Superman's last season, Noel Neill left acting. "I just didn't care to be in it anymore. I wasn't that fond of it. I didn't even try. I preferred to be married and normal." Eventually her marriage dissolved, and she returned to the motion picture business, but in distribution and syndication, not performing. "I'd gone out on a few interviews—'cattle calls'—and said, 'Forget it!' I didn't want at that point to break into the picture business, not after being in and getting out. It's a whole different ballgame now."

One area she did enjoy, though, was touring colleges with a nostalgic stage show. "It was a great ego trip for me, these college kids out there yelling and applauding. I'd show one of the shows, answer questions, then the kids will get up and play the parts. I give them scripts, props, wigs. In fact, I got Clayton Moore (who portrayed the Lone Ranger) started doing personal appearances. Clayton called me out of the blue a few years ago, because somebody'd called him from Texas, and he wanted to know what it was all about. Now he's making good money."

She is well-known around her office ("They all know Lois Lane.") but resents the fact that some people try to force her into a mold that she has long-since grown out of. "A child can meet you and there's no correlation

whatsoever. It's so embarrassing. A mother will haul the kid up and say, 'Here's Lois Lane.' Well, of course, he doesn't recognize me. So she'll kick him, then I'll kick her. There's a certain age that gets a charge out of seeing you. It means nothing to little kids, who can't associate you with what's on the screen; older people have no idea because when they were young, the show wasn't on."

There is, of course, a "new" Lois Lane in the person of Margot Kidder in the feature films. But Noel Neill's screen association goes on. In the first Superman film, Noel played the new Lois Lane's mother in a brief scene on a train. As the teenage Clark Kent runs past the train, a tiny girl points out the window and says, 'Mommy! That boy is running faster than a train!' Noel Neill, looking not much older than in 1957, says, 'Lois Lane, you certainly have a writer's imagination.' (This scene was cut in the theatrical version, but restored when the movie was televised.)

SUPERMAN'S BEST PAL

Jack Larson looks back on his days as Jimmy Olsen fondly—now. It was not always the case. At the time, he fought tooth and nail from being identified as the fumbling but well-meaning cub reporter. "I wouldn't pose for pictures, I wouldn't do interviews," says Larson. "I guess the Superman people thought I was difficult, and I don't think they've ever forgiven me. People would follow me down the streets, I was asked to leave restaurants because kids surrounded me. Onetime I was escorted by police out of the Metropolitan Museum of Art because I'd attracted such a crowd of kids around me. I resisted being identified with the role, but anytime I was in a film other than Superman, they'd go 'There's Jimmy!' So I put my energy into writing. I led a real double life."

Larson had begun acting and writing at nearly the same time, as a teenager. His high school teachers and his father, worried that young Jack spent too much time bowling and not enough time in school, arranged to enroll him in the experimental Pasadena Junior College, where he was encouraged to put his energy into writing and acting in plays, not playing hooky and going for strikes and spares. A talent agent spotted Larson, and signed him to a Warner Brothers studio contract. His professional film career began with a film called *Fighter Squadron* in 1948. While studying acting at the studio (Debbie Reynolds was a Warners classmate, as was John Barrymore, Jr.), he did small parts in such films as *The Redwood Forest* and *Starlift*. Work in the film industry slowed in 1950 and '51; Larson was released



from his contract, toured with Albert Dekker in the play *The Great Man*, but basically didn't know what to do with himself.

"Now, at that time, no one knew what tv was," recalls Larson. "It was 1951. I was offered a role in *Bells on Their Toes*, a sequel to *Cheaper by the Dozen*, but it was a standard studio contract. And I had the theatre bug. I wanted to go to New York. I was also offered this series. Everybody said, 'If you want to go to New York, do the series first. Nobody'll ever see it. Take the money and run. They were offering \$250 a week, so I took it.'"

Indeed, when the first twenty-six episodes were finished, no one saw them for quite some time. Larson went off to New York, and found himself in the company of like-minded writers and performers, doing avant garde plays in lofts way, way off Broadway.

Occasionally he returned to Hollywood for a film role. "One of them was a thing called *Kid Monk Baroni*," says Larson with a smile, "which has got to be the ultimate cult film. Leonard Nimoy played a prizefighter who gets plastic surgery, and Bruce Cabot was the star. Ima-



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gine, Mr. Spock, Jimmy Olsen and Cabot from **King Kong** all in the same movie."

By the end of 1953, the entire country had Superman-
mania, and every television watcher knew Jimmy Olsen.
In New York when the show began, Jack Larson grew a
beard so that he could ride the subways in peace.

The hours were long on **Superman**, but the tyro actor
treated every day as an important lesson. "The old vaudevillians I worked with, character actors who went way
back, had a way of working that I loved. They'd work on
bits of business, play with the pace of a scene, a kind of
'Lambs Club' attitude toward acting. Miss Barrymore was
always 'Miss Barrymore.' Very proper. You never dis-
cussed salary, or anybody's personal life. A seniorial atti-
tude. When it became something else, when everybody
approached every performance like a group therapy
session, it dimmed the joy of working."

One benefit to working in **Superman** was the proximi-
ty to Hollywood's past, which a film fan like Larson loved.
"The first season, we shot on the old RKO Culver City
lot, and the **Superman** people could never keep track of
me. Howard Hawks was shooting **The Big Sky**, and
I'd go over and watch. And **Limelight** was shooting
over in the theater set, so I'd sneak on and watch Chap-
lin and Keaton work. The old **Gone With the Wind**
set was still standing, which must have been something
for George, because that had been his first film."

Larson received a strict contract on **Superman** with a
'30-day option clause' that effectively limited him from
doing anything but Jimmy Olsen. "I figured, after we'd
shot a season's worth, I could go off to New York and do
plays. "I got a play, **The Fragile Fox**, right after we fin-
ished a season, but the **Superman** people wouldn't re-
lease me. 'We might need him. Maybe we'll want to
shoot some more.' Indeed, I didn't work for another nine
months until they started the next season's shows. That
happened so many times. My life as an actor was limited
to this 30-day period where I could go in, do it, and get
out. Consequently, I did a lot of live television. Other-
wise, if something might possibly take more than a
month, I'd ask, 'Will you please?' and they'd say 'No!'"

One of the many live tv plays Larson did co-starred ac-
tress Francis Farmer, who had spent many harrowing
years in an asylum, very possibly against her will. During
rehearsals, the director changed the planned staging,
asking Larson to approach Farmer from behind to give
his line. "We all knew she'd had problems, but she came
perfectly prepared, knew her craft. It was as if she'd never
been away from acting. But when he changed that,
and I sort of snuck up behind her and whispered my line,
she let out this scream—'Ahhhhhhhhhoohhhh!' She

looked at me and said, 'Don't ever sneak up behind me.'
She didn't apologize, and she had no reason to. She
understandably did not want people 'sneaking up on
her,' not after what she'd been through."

Larson resented being typecast as the bumbling **Daily Planet** reporter, and after the series ended, his career
fell by the wayside. Instead of fighting it, he pursued his
other love, writing. "I lived on grants and things for a long
time. I didn't have any money. But I don't want to sound
depressing. You can't run around and say, 'Oh, I only
made \$350 a segment,' that you feel cheated, that other
people have gotten immensely rich off the residuals. I
mean, Noel should be one of the richest people you
know. She has a nice home, and she's fine, and I'm all
right now, things are terrific. But they could've taken
care of us the way they did Siegel and Shuster. They
were forced into that." (As **COMICS FEATURE** read-
ers certainly know, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the co-
creators of **Superman**, sold the character to DC Comics
for a small sum of money. The company ignored the
men for many years until adverse publicity forced them
to give the originators a small allowance.)

Lately, Larson's literary star has begun ascending. A
poem he wrote, "Orpheus times Light" ("Orpheus x C")
was bought by the Joffrey Ballet, put to music, and has
become one of their standards; they then commis-
sioned a second work. Larson's latest libretto,
"Relativity of Icarus," premiered in Boston on the 16th of
March. With his partner, director James Bridges, Larson
is involved in making a feature film for the Ladd Compa-
ny, **Mike's Murder**, which starts production shortly.
"That'll be interesting," he muses. "The best deal we
could get on a sound stage was at Laird Studios, which
used to be the old RKO Pathe lot, where we shot the
original season of **Superman**. I'm going to look around
and see if my old dressing room is there."

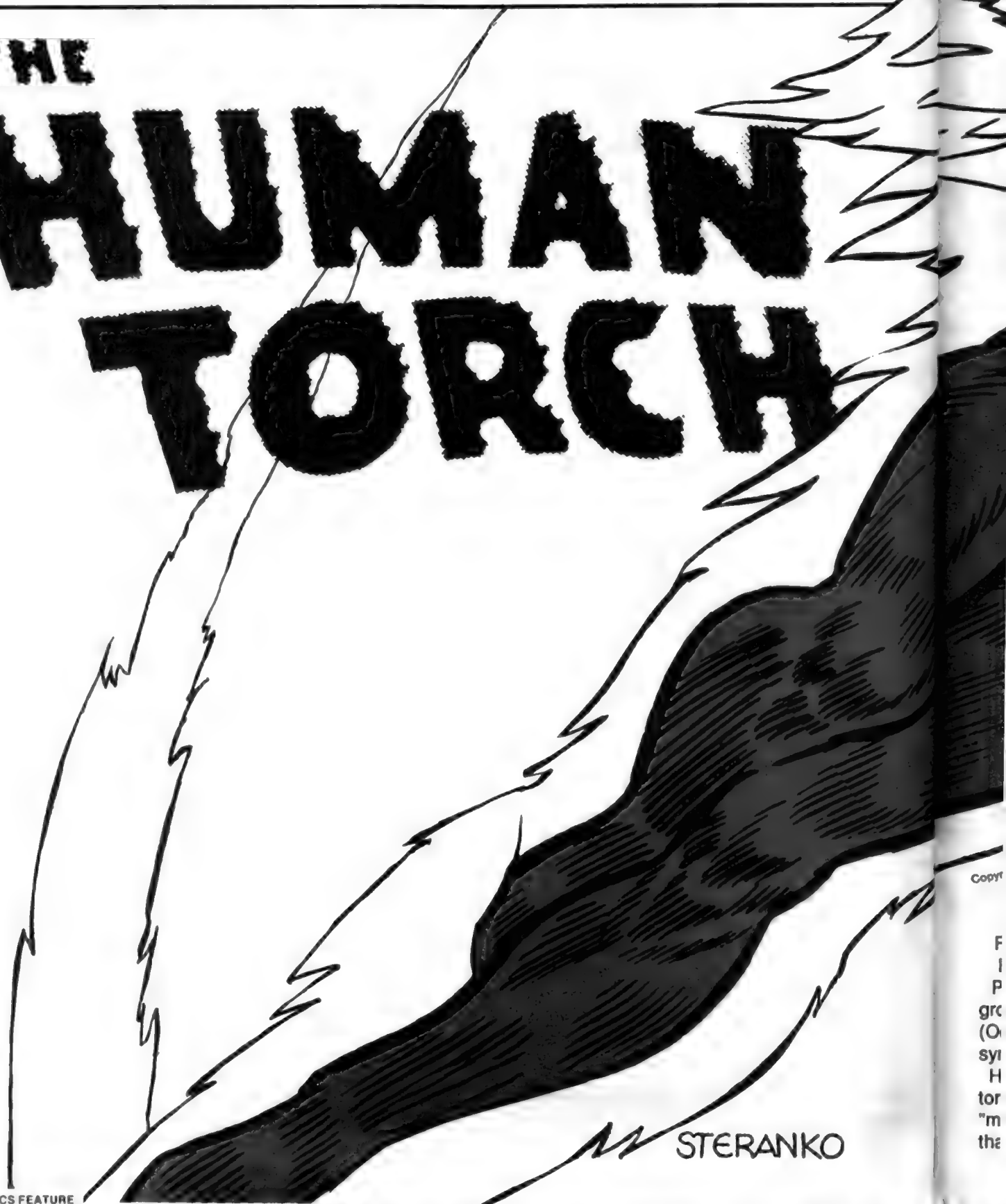
Next issue, in part two of **The Superman Family**, we'll
talk with Inspector Henderson, Robert Shayne, and take
a look at the last days of **Superman**, George Reeves.

CF

LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

BY ROY THOMAS

THE HUMAN TORCH





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First of all, friends, he wasn't.
Human, that is.

Professor Horton explained the whole thing to a small group of reporters in the first issue of **Marvel Comics** (October 1939). "I have created," he informed them, "a synthetic man—an exact replica of a human being."

However, like Victor von Frankenstein before him, Horton had erred in some way in the composition of his own "modern Prometheus" and now feared the monstrosity that he had invented.

To the reporters, the Torch seemed Human enough. Enclosed in a transparent cage, he wore an all-blue costume. When a little air was let into the glass cage, however, the android burst into flame.

Horrified, the reporters demanded that Horton (who admitted he could not control his creation's flame) destroy his "monster." Horton refused, but later relented and entombed his humanoid in a huge concrete block (inside a steel tube, yet!).

Time passed, and the "fire-man" (as he was often called



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in those early issues) was virtually forgotten. However, one day Horton awoke to the sound of a tremendous blast which, he quickly discovered, had freed his invention. Somehow, there had been just the tiniest leak in the concrete, thru which a bit of air had eventually seaped, causing the Torch to burst into highly explosive flame.

While Horton was donning his hat, the Torch was running through the city streets, setting people ablaze. Not a particularly auspicious beginning for a supposedly humane hero, eh?

He wasn't doing it on purpose, though. In fact, he asked himself in confusion, "Why must everything I touch turn to flame?"

Having no desire to continue causing so much trouble, the Torch found the nearest swimming pool and dived in. Unfortunately, this pool happened to belong to a man named Sardo, who trapped Torch and decided to use him to make a little extortion money for his old age security.

Accordingly, Sardo took the Torch (in a glass, airless cage) into a warehouse belonging to someone who had refused to pay "protection". Suddenly released, the puzzled Torch burst into flames and caused the usual holocaust.

At first he was confused again: "I confess I don't understand. I thought Sardo was trying to help me."

However, like all good little superheroes, he possessed an infallible sixth sense in such matters: "I wonder if he might be just a low-down racketeer."

More than just air must have seaped into that concrete block. The Torch had acquired an entire liberal arts education, no less.

It was at this point that Torch discovered he could make great leaps (a la Superman and Captain Marvel, neither of whom could fly in very early issues). The writer explained this cannily: "The blue and combined red flames made the Human Torch lighter than air." He landed blocks away and ran for Sardo and his men. He got them.

In this same origin story he found a way to control his

flame. A tank of nitrogen caused his fire to die down a bit. At this point the fire chief ran in, gun in hand, and shot the Torch in the head. However, his still superhot skin saved him.

When they heard the whole story, the police released the Torch in the custody of Horton. However, the scientist didn't understand his creation very well and expressed his intention to use the Torch to gain a fortune (albeit an honest one). Incensed and enflamed, our fiery friend zoomed off, burning a hole in the roof.

ON HIS OWN

The next issue of **Marvel Mystery Comics** (as it was now labeled) showed that evidently the Torch had unintentionally killed Horton when flying off. The splash page explained how the Torch had misunderstood Horton's intentions and had flown away.

In the second story the Torch was framed and tossed into jail, where he met a policeman named Johnson, who gave him some needed information about the person really behind the crimes for which the flaming one was in jail. Fired up now, the Torch escaped and rushed off to an auto race to foil new murders.

He was still something of a novice in the matter of controlling his flame, and he accidentally set the stands afire. It was then that he revealed an interesting power of his that disappeared in the comic before long. He whirled and let out a "long, weird yell" which caused the fire and smoke to vanish at once.

"Ah," he smiled, "those flames know their master's voice." Arf, arf.

In the fifth issue Torch tried something which was later attempted (with the same lack of permanent success) by Johnny Storm. Working on a case with Johnson, he wore street clothes and adopted a secret identity, Jim Hammond, which he kept for a few issues. It never really caught on, though.

Meanwhile, Torch's powers continued to grow by leaps and bounds. In issue six (the first issue in which his costume was seen in the traditional red color, though not yet with yellow trimming) he was chasing some crooks who had stolen a vital serum and were fleeing by dogsled. He lifted his hands to his mouth, whispered to them, and then hurled fireballs which encircled the sled and led it to the plague-stricken town of Orton, whose populace was anxiously awaiting the serum.

Also in the sixth issue, the Torch was knocked out by crooks who intended to run over him with a tractor. But it was not to be. Torch had previously started a rampaging fire in the meadow in which he now lay, and the flames,

"sensing their master is in danger," streaked across the field to form a fiery barrier between him and the tractor. They were almost as intelligent as Green Lantern's ring!

Up to now, the Torch had been just a "fire bum." In issue seven, however, he informed his friend Johnson that he wanted to be a policeman. He was, of course, an honor student at the police academy and later—after he accidentally burned up a couple of blue-boy suits—was appointed "the first legal officer without a uniform." Later, though, he often wore one.

Soon it was found that he needed all his recently-acquired powers over fire, as he and the Sub-Mariner had the first of their several duels in the next few issues of **Marvel Mystery** (in #'s 8 and 9, and the first page of #10).

At about this time, the Torch, like so many other heroes before and after him, gained a teenage sidekick. Young Toro had somehow acquired (in a train wreck that had killed his parents) immunity from fire. He was a fire-eater in a circus when Torch found him, taught him a few tricks (such as flaming on and flying), and made him a junior partner in crime prevention. Toro first appeared in **The Human Torch #1**; his first **Marvel Mystery** adventure occurred a few months later, in issue eighteen.

Torch's popularity grew. Though he had appeared on only about half of the first twenty covers of **Marvel Mystery**, he soon had not only his own magazine but was part of the lineup in **All Winners** as well. The first issue of the latter comic (which in later years was destined to feature the Torch and others in a JSA-type group called the All-Winners Squad) appeared in summer of 1941.

In addition to this, he later appeared in **Captain America**, **All Select** and other comics.

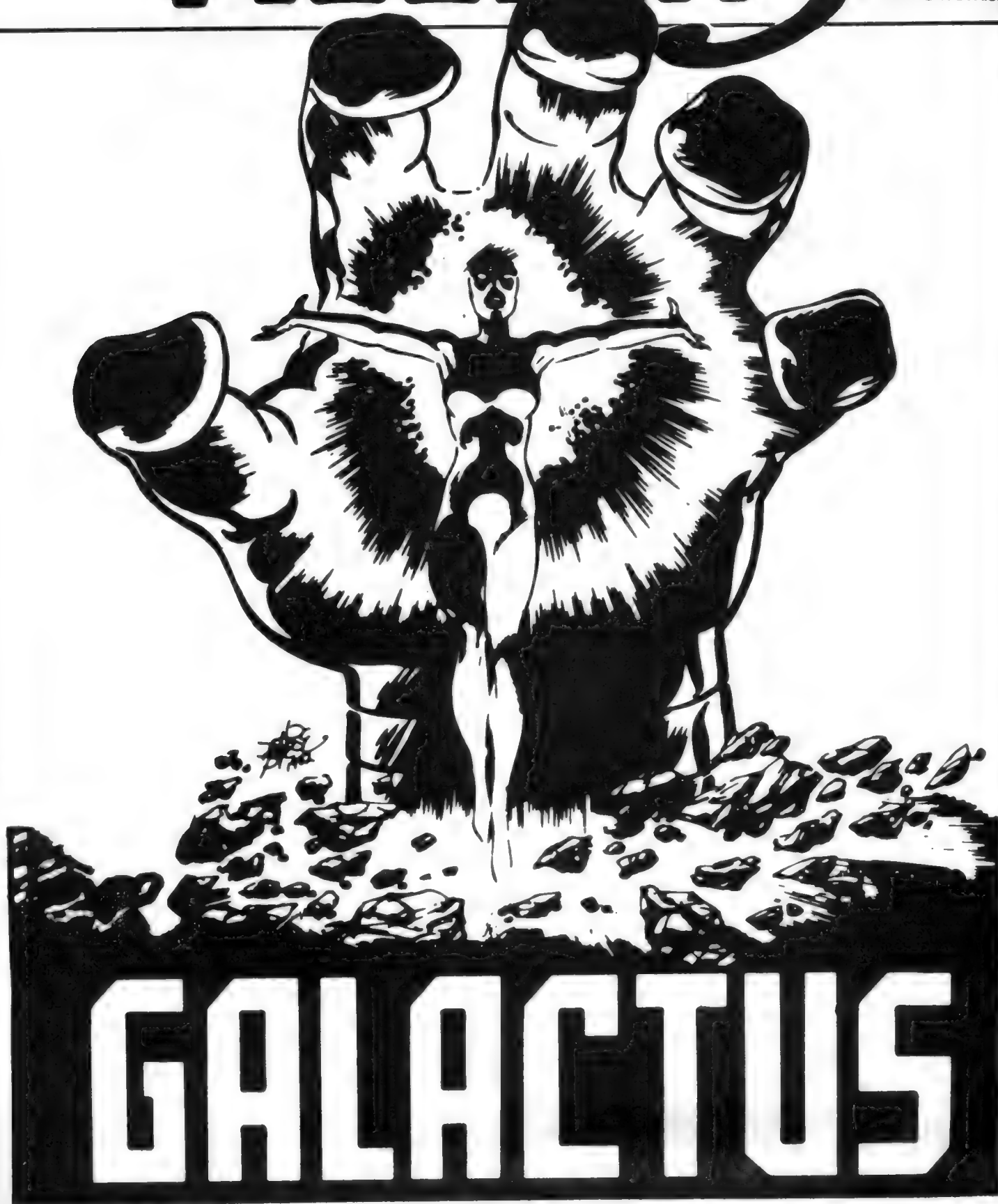
Despite the fact that Carl Burgos' artwork for the early strip improved (though it didn't reach a high until the short revival of the Torch in the mid-'50s), the Torch never attained quite the popularity of Superman and Captain Marvel.

Still, the Human Torch outlasted most of the superheroes, and is back today stronger (not to mention younger and more human) than ever! It would appear that Burgos—or whoever invented the Human Torch—had a "hot idea" at that! **CF**

ROY THOMAS writes/edits **All-Star**, **Infinity Inc.** and **Secret Origins** for DC and **Elixir** for First. Previously he introduced both **Star Wars** and **Conan** to Marvel where he also served as Editor-in Chief.

VILLAINS

BY JAMES VAN HISE



Where the Silver Surfer appeared, Galactus could not be far behind. This is how Marveldom learned of the coming of this controversial being in 1965, and certainly the Marvel universe has never been quite the same since.

The menace of Galactus is such that when he first appears, The Watcher breaks his vow of non-interference with the affairs of other races in order to attempt to shield the Earth from the awareness of the Silver Surfer. The Watcher comes to Reed Richards and together they conspire to attempt to save our world. When they fail to trick the Surfer, The Watcher goes so far as to plead his case directly to Galactus himself.

"Heed my words, pillager of the planets!" pleads the Watcher. "This tiny speck of matter upon which we stand contains intelligent life! You must not destroy it!"

It is at this point that we learn just what it is that Galactus does. He "eats" planets--absorbs their energy so that he can live. According to the Watcher, the previous worlds consumed by Galactus were unpopulated worlds, until The Silver Surfer chose the Earth. But why Earth? Why not Jupiter or Venus? What makes the Earth so tasty? Considering the times Galactus will return in the future to attempt to fulfill his goal of engorging himself on our planetary sustenance, there must be something quite attractive about our small, green world.

Galactus is portrayed as a being who lives on a cosmic scale; humans or whoever inhabits the world he chooses to consume are as far below his notice as ants are to us. If there's a lot of ants, or they invade our domiciles, we notice them. When the Fantastic Four confront Galactus, he notices them because they have the power to make their presence felt.

This being who calls himself Galactus is so removed from the realm of normal beings that even when the Watcher and the FF successfully thwart the planet-eater's plans to lay waste to the Earth, he harbors no malice. All of time and eternity are open to him and this is just one brief instant.

GALACTUS: VILLAIN OR ?

The first appearance of Galactus does not deal with his duality, with whether he is good or evil or something entirely separate from such human distinctions. Clearly when he first appears on Earth he is a menace of cosmic proportions. The Watcher stands in clear defiance of Galactus and even the Silver Surfer rebels against allowing his master to snuff out all life on an entire planet.

The fact that in **Fantastic Four** #48-50 he responds in human terms to those who defy him means that we translate what he is doing into human terms as well. When the FF attack him, Galactus summons the Punisher. When he's forced to withdraw, as a parting shot to his treacherous herald, he robs the Silver Surfer of his space-faring powers, thus stranding him on our world.

When Galactus withdraws, it is to find a world other than Earth, which he promises not to attack again. But Galactus cannot find another world in this sector and soon he decides that he needs his herald back, and in FF#74, The Silver Surfer receives a summons to return to Galactus, a summons that his former herald refuses.

Even as Galactus feels a cosmic hunger gnawing at him, he muses on his promise to spare our world, and states, "And though I have pledged that Earth shall ever be inviolate--the beckoning specter of grim starvation may cause so ephemeral a covenant soon to be shattered!"

He also states that Galactus must never perish, but at this point in Marvel history, it just sounds like something self-serving that a character would say as it is not presented in a broader context such as we would encounter later.

When The Surfer actually manages to find a place on Earth where Galactus cannot find him, the planet-eater compels the FF to find his former herald in order to spare the Earth from whatever menace he might choose to hurl at it. A sample was a planetoid which could have smashed an entire continent. The Surfer learns of the price of his flight and returns to Galactus, finding him an uninhabited world which contains the life-sustaining energies his master needs. But when The Surfer thereafter requests his freedom, Galactus refuses. He needs to know exactly where he can find his herald whenever he has need of him, even should that need not occur for countless millennia.

As revealed in **Silver Surfer** #1 (1968), The Surfer was a human, Norrin Rad, who offered himself to become the herald of Galactus so that the planet destroyer would spare Norrin's home world of Zenn-La. One wonders if the Surfer ever considered that by defying Galactus, by going back on his pledge, that Galactus could go back on his as well and return to Zenn-La? But he never did, although he certainly still could. . .

In **Thor** #134, Galactus is glimpsed on one page on his way to a dark galaxy where he indicates he will consume the power he detects there. This thread is picked up in **Thor** #160-162 when Galactus confronts the living planet, Ego, and is driven off by the only force he

VILLAINS



has encountered which has been able to actually inflict pain on him--Thor. During their initial encounter, when Galactus first grapples with Thor, he observes, "If such as you can be a god. . . then what shall we call the great Galactus??" What indeed? In the following issue the first clues to the origin of Galactus are revealed when Odin looks back in time to find the beginnings of this being. Since Galactus is viewed as Odin's sworn enemy because his power rivals that of Odin himself, Thor searches Galactus out, expecting it to take ages. But Thor finds Galactus without much trouble, because the destroyer of planets wishes it. He is weary of the chase, and chooses to reveal the truth of his origins rather than engage Thor in battle. In fact he has little trouble keeping Thor at bay, subjecting the Thunder God to a mist which reveals the truth of the origins of Galactus.

THE TRUTH--AND MORE!

In Thor #168 and 169 (1969), we're introduced to the home world of Galactus, a long dead planet called Taa, described by Galactus as, "A planet so far advanced from any other that there are no words to do it justice! Taa! The most advanced civilization in the universe!" There men travelled in thought spheres which were so powerful that they could penetrate to the heart of fiery volcanoes and the darkest depths of the sea. But not all their wonders could prepare them for the discovery that the atoms of their universe were changing.

Galan, one of their foremost scientists, had travelled to the farthest end of the cosmos and found nothing that could aid them. All he learned was that Taa was one of the last worlds still in existence. A plague of universal decay was sweeping the galaxies and through the super-scientific wonder of their powerful visi-screens, they watched as other races perished as the radiation from the edge of oblivion approached them.

Even as the unseen death sweeps upon them, striking down countless numbers of the people of Taa, they search for one who might be immune to the plague so that some vestige of Taa will live on after the great change comes to pass. But none is found and when only a handful remain alive, they choose to crew a ship to journey to that place where men have never been--the terminal point of the universe.

A starship sets forth on its final flight into the blazing cosmic cauldron into which all the matter of the universe was plunging. A cosmic ray burst inundated the ship and all were slain save one. It is then that the impossible happened, as the universe itself spoke to this last son of Taa!

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"Hear me, last son of Taa--I am the sentience of the Universe! Like yourself, I am dying. In mere moments as I mark time I shall have drawn all the matter in the cosmos into my bosom, and collapse beneath my own abysmal weight. But though we both must die, we need not die without an heir. Come, surrender yourself to my fiery embrace and let us become as one. Let our death throes serve as birthpangs for a new form of life. In a time beyond time shall be born a new universe and into that universe there shall be one entity like no other--a living organism who possesses the matchless power and raging appetite of a galaxy. But he shall be more than a galaxy, he shall be a galactic ravager. . . he shall be. . . GALACTUS!"

For eons the ship bearing this metamorphic being hurtled through the cosmos until it passed within reach of a planet's gravity. There it drew the attention of a Watcher, who used his power to draw the ship down to the planet. Upon entering, he found a being in some sort of suspension, and rightly recognized that as it broke from its cubicle there was enough power there to shatter a planet! The Watcher recognizes the nature of the being and realizes that he is in a position to destroy it before it can harness its total force. But he is a Watcher, sworn never to interfere in the affairs of living things. The Watcher departs from the ship, which once more launches itself into space.

On board, the being creates a body suit which aids in regulating the awesome energies he possesses. Then he transforms the ship itself into a chamber in which he could mature. This new vessel drifted for centuries until it fell into orbit around a verdant planet. The people of that world detect the vessel but choose not to tamper with it. The ship orbits the world unmolested until a battle of the planets breaks out and this warfare brings this strange vessel to the awareness of the invaders who choose to attack it lest it be some weapon of their enemies. Instead this attack merely rouses Galactus, who emerges for the first time in his new form. He lays waste to the invading armada and thence to the planet below as Galactus is hungry and feeds now for the first time.

But when Galactus viewed the carnage he had wrought he was moved by the part of him that was human and he chose to transform the remains the shattered planet into his new home world. When he was finished, millennia later, the Taa II spanned the entire solar system and planets orbited it as though it were a star.

In **Super-Villain Classics** #1 (May 1983), this origin of Galactus, as originally presented in a fractured format in *Thor*, is reprinted in a more coherent form. But



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something new is added. Galactus asks himself aloud why he must survive? His answer? "For no matter how many worlds I devour. . .how many civilizations I destroy. . . it is my destiny to one day give back to the universe infinitely more than I have ever taken from it."

This puts the being into a perspective that other cosmic beings lack. While The Beyonder seemed to have no real purpose, Galactus does, but only the end of our universe will reveal that purpose. "The Last Galactus Story" by John Byrne which began running in **Epic Magazine** would have perhaps answered this riddle, but with both **Epic** and John Byrne gone, Galactus seems destined to remain as colossal a mystery as ever.

RETURN TO EARTH

The event sometimes both threatened and promised by Galactus finally comes to pass with **Fantastic Four** #121-123 -- his return to Earth.

At first it is not apparent that this is what is happening as Galactus sends his new herald, a robot named Gabriel, to warn Earth that it's time of doom is at hand.

But Galactus offers to stay his hand, if The Silver Surfer rejoins him. While the Surfer is at hand, he vows to no more be the slave to his former master. The **Fantastic Four** do their best to distract Galactus while the Silver



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Surfer attempts to reach the orbiting spacecraft of the planet killer, for even Galactus needs a vessel to move through space. The Surfer is unable to reach it because Galactus wisely orbited it beyond the barrier which the Surfer cannot cross, but that doesn't stop Mr. Fantastic. He is able to use the FF's missile to reach the ship and manages to breach its defenses. Then it is Galactus who is given an ultimatum--swear to leave Earth in peace or see his own ship destroyed, thus effectively stranding Galactus himself on Earth. Galactus threatens to destroy humanity anyway, whereupon the Surfer offers to surrender rather than see that happen. But Reed Richards refuses to allow the Surfer to subject himself to slavery. Finally Richards sees no alternative but to return Galactus' ship to him, but Galactus has agreed to leave so long as the Surfer follows him wherever he may go in the universe. But Reed had tampered with the controls on the ship so that it passes into the negative zone, which is outside our universe and filled with enough worlds to sustain Galactus, thus freeing the Surfer from his pledge to accompany him.

The Earth seems safe until Galactus returns in **Thor #225** (July 1974), his coming announced by his new herald, Firelord. But Galactus has not come to menace our world once more, rather to request the aid of Thor in dealing with the menace of Ego, the living planet, which has gone mad. They journey to the now mad planet and a team comprised of Thor, Hercules and Firelord manage to stun the intelligence at the core of the world while Galactus attaches a sidereal propulsion unit, taken from Taa II, to the south polar axis of Ego. The world is blasted out of that region on an endless journey through the universe where it will be unable to stop and menace anything.

Galactus is saddened by what they had to do to Ego because, like himself, Ego was once a man, and part of that man still lives within him, and with it lives human compassion. Firelord chooses this moment to state that while he has long served Galactus without complaint, he was once a free man as well, and he craves that freedom again. Galactus agrees to grant it if a loyal herald can be found to replace him. Back on Earth that new herald is offered to Galactus in the form of The Destroyer, an all powerful mindless being once created by Odin to defend the Earth in the far future. By giving the Destroyer a small portion of his enormous life energy, Galactus has his new herald and Firelord is set free.

In **Fantastic Four #172-175**, Galactus returns, not to threaten our Earth, but rather to feed on Counter-Earth. This is a world which is in the same orbit as the Earth but on the opposite side of the sun. It is an artifi-



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cially created planet but it's life is very real and the people there are in many (but not all) ways parallel to the people of Earth. The High Evolutionary is responsible for life on that world and he opposes the plans of Galactus. The Fantastic Four have travelled to Counter-Earth to attempt to save it from Galactus, just as they have saved our own world twice before. Galactus offers the FF an alternative to attacking Counter-Earth--all they need do is find him a suitable replacement. But Galactus grows weary of waiting and he prepares to feed on Counter-Earth. Then the High Evolutionary steps in to oppose him and the two titans battle in the skies while the world watches. Finally Galactus blasts the High Evolutionary into the Negative Zone. But before he can get on with consuming the world, the Fantastic Four return and battle Galactus to prevent him from destroying Counter-Earth. But The Invisible Girl had not yet returned from her journey to find a world suitable for Galactus, and when she does she reveals that she has found one willing to sacrifice itself to him. Galactus finds that she speaks true. He journeys to that world, but when he tries to feed on it there is some sort of feedback which begins to kill him. But the High Evolutionary, who has returned from the Negative Zone, still feels a kinship to the basic humanity that lurks in Galactus and feels that he must try to save him. Using a powerful beam, he reduces Galactus to pure inorganic energy. The saga of Galactus seems to be at an end.

Oh, and if you're wondering why Galactus should get struck down by doing what he does best, it's because he was tricked. That world was the planet Poppup, home of the Impossible Man, a world where all of the beings exist as one community mind. They changed themselves to look human and when Galactus tried to consume all those community-brain Poppupians, it was like having a dinner of hot air--no nourishment there. Yeah, it's a pretty strange bit all right.

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THE RETURN OF GALACTUS

Fantastic Four #210 reveals that while Galactus was reduced to energy, his machines to absorb the energy from the planet Poppup were still operating and those machines recreated the organic state of Galactus. Reed Richards figured this out and knew when Galactus was on the prowl again because he long ago created a warning signal attuned to his alien metabolism.

Since they were already way off in space, the FF choose to go to Taa II to seek the aid of Galactus against a being headed for Earth. This thing, named The Sphinx, supposedly has power to rival that of Galactus, but the planet eater chooses to aid the FF in exchange for them bringing a being to him named Terrax to serve as his new herald.

Continuity buffs should note here that no mention is made of The Destroyer, who was the last herald of Galactus.

Galactus battles and defeats The Sphinx, and then turns his attention to Earth. But once again the FF use the Ultimate Nullifier to threaten and drive Galactus away, although he vows to return one day.

In Dazzler #10 & 11, Galactus chooses her to exact punishment on his traitorous herald, Terrax. While Terrax is evil and unopposed to the odious task of searching out planets for Galactus to consume, he is also drunk with power and continues his former empire-lust by seeking out a planet of his own to conquer. Dazzler finds and defeats Terrax, returning him to Galactus, who now feels that his herald has been humbled once again and can go on serving him.

In Rom #26 & 27, Galactus threaten's Rom's home world until he offers to show Galactus a better planet to consume, one in the Dark Nebula, the home world of the Dire Wraiths!

In Fantastic Four #243 & 244, Galactus returns to Earth and is opposed by the FF, the Avengers and Dr. Strange. Even Terrax betrays him again. Galactus falls and is actually near death until saved by Reed Richards, who does not believe that the planet killer acts out of evil, but merely survival. Captain America agrees. Thor even provides the necessary power. Since Terrax had betrayed Galactus again, he needs a new herald. Frankie Ray offers to be this herald in return for his pledge to once again spare the Earth. This is something that Frankie Ray has long wanted, the power to experience life far beyond anything she has ever imagined. For the first time, Galactus has found a herald who is happy in her servile role, although it is doubtful that she would ever view it as anything so mundane.

In Hercules #4 (Dec. '82), the son of Zeus is wandering the universe when he encounters Frankie Ray as she picks out a planet for Galactus to consume. Hercules opposes this and ultimately goes to confront the planet eater himself. For the first time since his creation, we see Galactus remove his helmet and see the face of the man with the power. Hercules attempts to get Galactus drunk and it so amuses this cosmic being that he actually laughs, perhaps for the first time in recorded memory. For that Galactus chooses to spare the planet for Hercules actually managed to make this strange being forget his hunger.

That hunger is satisfied in FF #257 when he consumes the Skrull home world, a planet which for centuries had successfully masked its presence from Galactus. This time it fails and we see what happens when a planet teeming with life is drained of that life. Then he sleeps while his herald, Nova (Frankie Ray) watches over him.

Galactus appears in FF#262 when Reed Richards is put on trial on another world for being responsible for saving the life of Galactus, one of the most dreaded beings in the universe. Both Galactus and the Watcher appear to explain what the universal truth of Galactus is. When he is disbelieved, then the being whose power even Galactus bows to, the incomparable Eternity, appears. Eternity causes those who would judge Reed Richards to feel what it is to be Galactus, both the glory and the pain, as well as the sense of purpose in the universe, and the fact that without Galactus the destiny of the universe would be snuffed out. But what is that destiny? Perhaps only such beings as Galactus and Eternity truly know.

JAMES VAN HISE is the former editor of one of the oldest fanzines in the comic book field, author of *The Art of Al Williamson* and editor of *Monsterland*.

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